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THE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CONNEXION: Tackling the Myth.

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the Open University

by

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The Primitive Methodist Connexion is usually seen as a product of its working-class origins. This thesis argues that whilst the movement saw itself thus, its leaders were from the outset often discreetly prosperous. One of its co-founders, Hugh Bourne, was also its first chronicler, and he chose instead to portray them as humble latter-day disciples ministering to a Biblical poor. Bourne's diaries, which tell a rather different story, were marginalised or ignored by the connexion's later writers, who preferred the retrospective version; and historians of the last half-century read the resulting religious allegory as a factual account of class-inspired contestation. Most previous studies of the movement have focused on rural areas, concluding that it comprised the poor and ill-educated end of the working-class spectrum; yet this was, in its first half-century, more a movement of the industrial village.

The thesis uses early baptismal registers and the 1851 Religious Census to demonstrate that its earliest adherents were broadly a match, socially, for their Wesleyan counterparts, and that its many small plain chapels reflected expansion strategy, not denominational poverty. It argues that the early movement's followers were distinguished by revivalistic preference, not socio-economic circumstances or alienation. It also exploits, in a way impossible only five or ten years ago, two new sources. The British Library digitised archive of 19th-century newspapers provided a less embattled image of Primitive Methodism than that afforded by anecdote. Meanwhile, the genealogical databases spawned by the internet era and a growing interest in family history made it possible to track the fortunes of many of the movement's officers and itinerant preachers, who proved to be surprisingly – and increasingly – prosperous.

It concludes that the predominantly working-class composition of the denomination which has so dominated subsequent accounts was a mature product of its religious nature, not the source of its success.

Table of Contents

List of:	Abbreviations	ii
	Tables, Figures, Maps and Chapel Images	iii
Chapter 1:	Introduction	1
Chapter 2:	Hugh Bourne	28
Chapter 3:	The Problem of Discourse	50
Chapter 4:	The Growth Era in Context	71
Chapter 5:	The Hidden Years	94
Chapter 6:	The Baptismal Registers	119
Chapter 7:	The 1851 Religious Census	150
Chapter 8:	The Primitive Methodist Chapel	180
Chapter 9:	The Connexion's Officials	223
Chapter 10:	Reflections and Conclusions	271
Appendix	The Bourne Manuscripts	287
	Bibliography	292
	Maps	312
	Chapels	319

List of Abbreviations

BC(s)	Bible Christian Methodists
CMM	Camp Meeting Methodists
Cong	The Congregationalist movement; its congregations
CRO	Cheshire Record Office, City of Chester Archives, Duke Street, Chester
CSRO	City of Stoke-on-Trent Archives, Hanley Record Office, Central Library, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent.
LRO	Lincolnshire Archives, Lincoln Record Office, Rosemary Street, Lincoln
MARC	Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Deansgate, Manchester.
PM	Primitive Methodist Connexion/Church; alternatively
Prims	Primitive Methodist Connexion/Church
PMM	Primitive Methodist Magazine
PWHS	Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society
UMFC	United Methodist Free Churches
WM	Wesleyan Methodist Connexion/Church

List of Tables

Table	Page
3.1 Early Hull Class Leaders	66
4.1 Primitive Methodist ticket-holders, 1811-1861	79
4.2 The changing pattern of press coverage, 1820-1850	88
6.1 Incidence of unskilled fathers in PM baptisms, five previous studies	131
6.2 Incidence of unskilled fathers by county type, Watts analysis	131
6.3 Changing social fractions of PM and WM fathers, eight industrial counties, 1820s-1830s (Watts)	132
6.4 Changing social fractions of PM fathers, four rural counties, 1840s-1860s (Watts)	133
6.5 Comparative social fractions of PM and WM fathers, 1820s-1830s, for Potteries circuit only	137
6.6 Comparative social fractions of PM and WM fathers, 1830s, for Newcastle-under-Lyme circuit only	138
6.7 Literacy levels among PM parents 1820-1837, and host community 1851, North Staffordshire	140
6.8 Incidence and density of surname repetition in PM and WM circuits of North Staffordshire, 1830s.	144
6.9 Incidence of non-manual fathers in three circuit registers, 1840s-1870s	147
7.1 English counties ranked by PM worship density at 1851	155
7.2 English counties ranked by unskilled incidence in host population, with PM worship density at 1851 for comparison	162
7.3 PM worship density by county type	165
7.4 Correlation between illiteracy and PM worship density, by county type	167
7.5 English counties ranked by depressed worker incidence in host population, with PM worship density at 1851 for comparison	168
7.6 Ranked list of correlations between PM and seven principal claimed influences	169
7.7 Outlet patterns in SW Cheshire	173
7.8 Characteristics of three selected counties	175
7.9 Mean propinquity of PM places of worship in three counties at 1851	175
7.10 Propinquity patterns of PM places of worship in Shropshire at 1851	176
7.11 Propinquity patterns of PM places of worship in Derbyshire at 1851	176
8.1 Cost per seat of Nonconformist chapels by decade, 1801-1900	192

8.2	Correlation coefficients among date, size and cost per seat, PM, WM and Cong	194
8.3	Cost per seat by chapel size and date, PM, WM and Cong compared	194
8.4	Range of costs per seat, PM, WM and Cong, 1871-1900	195
8.5	Varying propensity to build Gothic chapels, split 1801-1850 and 1851-1900, PM, WM and Cong compared	204
8.6	Varying propensity to build distinguished chapels, by design family PM, WM and Cong compared	204
8.7	Table 8.7 recast by date	204
9.1	Probate value of representative sample of Victorian wills, 1862-1900, expressed as percentile thresholds	253
9.2	Numbers of notable PM figures dying with proved wills, 1862-1900, by percentile	259
9.3	Numbers of PM itinerants dying with proved wills, 1862-1900, by percentile	261
9.4	Propensity to employ a domestic servant	264

List of Figures

Figure		Page
1	Affiliation Model	21
4	PM Membership and Reach, 1811-1911	80
7	Main Interdenominational Correlations at 1851	160
8	Architectural trends in Nonconformist chapels	197

List of Maps

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------|
| 1 | Tunstall and 1811/1812 preaching-places | © AJC |
| 2 | Yates' Map of Staffordshire, 1775 (part) | out of copyright |
| 3 | Ordnance Survey Map, Ford Hayes, current (2012) | © OS |
| 4 | Ordnance Survey Map, ditto, 1 st Edition | © Edina and OS |
| 5 | Ordnance Survey Map, ditto, localised, current (2012) | © OS |
| 6 | MS Virtual Earth image, ditto, farmhouse highlighted | © Steven Birks |
| 7 | Anglican, Wesleyan and PM Churches and Chapels | © AJC |

Of South-West Cheshire at 1880

List of Chapel Images

- | | |
|---------|---|
| Image 1 | Maesbury PM Chapel, Shropshire, 1834 |
| Image 2 | Bomere Heath Congregational, Shropshire 1827 (refenestrated late 19th C) |
| Image 3 | Macclesfield Beech Lane PM Chapel, 1830 |
| Image 4 | Bailgate Congregational chapel, Lincoln, 1876 |
| Image 5 | Bailgate WM Chapel, Lincoln, 1880 |
| Image 6 | Englesea Brook PM Chapel, Cheshire, 1828 (as extended 1832) |
| Image 7 | Clive Green Wesleyan Methodist Association Chapel, Winsford, Cheshire, 1849 |

- Image 8 Bouthwaite WM Chapel, North Yorkshire, 1890
- Image 9 Huxley PM chapel, Cheshire, 1861
- Image 10 Tiverton PM chapel, Cheshire, 1864
- Image 11 Hartington Street PM chapel, Barrow-in-Furness, 1874
- Image 12 Marsh Street PM chapel, Barrow-in-Furness, 1875
- Image 13 Cloud PM chapel, Staffordshire, 1815
- Image 14 Key Green WM (2nd) chapel, Cheshire, 1845
- Image 15 Ellerdine Heath WM Chapel, Shropshire, 1814 (as extended 1830s)
- Image 16 Hull Mill Street Chapel (drawing), 1819
- Image 17 South Cave WM Chapel, East Yorks, 1816
- Image 18 Cottingham Zion Congregational Chapel, East Yorks, 1819
- Image 19 Scarborough Durham Street WM Mission-Room, N Yorks, c. 1885
- Image 20 Pennington Memorial PM Mission-Hall, Kendal, 1899
- Image 21 Bradfield Road PM Mission-Hall, Crewe, 1899
- Image 22 Whitchurch WM Chapel, Shropshire, 1810
- Image 23 Cheltenham WM Chapel, 1839
- Image 24 Newark WM Chapel, Notts, 1846
- Image 25 Tonge WM Chapel, Greater Manchester, 1886
- Image 26 Lowther Street Congregational Chapel, Carlisle, 1843
- Image 27 Staithes PM Chapel, N Yorks, 1880
- Image 28 Hayfield WM Chapel, Derbyshire, 1780
- Image 29a Glossop PM Sunday School, Derbyshire; fenestration echoing
- 29b Glossop PM Chapel, Derbyshire, 1855
- Image 30 Chorley PM Chapel, Lancashire, 1866
- Image 31 Brindley Ford PM Chapel, Staffordshire, 1889
- Image 32 Leyland PM Chapel, Lancashire, 1892
- Image 33 Northorpe PM Chapel, Lincs, 1849
- Image 34 Welsh Row PM Chapel, Nantwich, Cheshire, 1840
- Image 35 Lingwood PM Chapel, Norfolk, 1866
- Image 36 Bradshaw PM Chapel, Tottington, Lancashire, 1890
- Image 37 Middleton-in-Teesdale WM Chapel, 1870
- Image 38 Middleton-in-Teesdale PM Chapel, 1872

THE PRIMITIVE METHODIST CONNEXION

Tackling the Myth

[The] basic facts of when and how [the Primitive Methodists] got off the ground are clear enough, but understanding these developments in a proper denominational and social context has proved rather more difficult.¹

David Hempton, 1984

Hempton's view compares strangely with these:

The lay movement that took the name Society of the People Called Primitive Methodists became a distinct sect chiefly because of trends that developed in the Old Connexion between 1800 and 1820.²

Julia Werner, 1984

The Primitive Methodist Connexion...aimed towards a more egalitarian form of worship while reinvigorating the teachings of early Methodism...its early years reveal aspects of cottage religion essential to an understanding of nineteenth-century popular evangelicalism.³

Deborah Valenze, 1985

By adopting the title Primitive Methodist [the founders] intended to signify a rejection of the respectable, dignified, and restrained Wesleyanism of the nineteenth century and a return to what they regarded as the original zeal of John Wesley and the first Methodist preachers.⁴

Michael Watts, 1995

Primitive Methodism...arose as a result of the perceived increasing conservatism of the Original Connexion, which appeared to be stagnating, becoming worldly, intent on appeasing a suspicious government, and failing to win over further converts and the working classes.⁵

Keith Snell and Paul Ell, 2000

As is well known, Primitive Methodism owed its origins to rifts within Methodism between 1807-12⁶

Delia Garrett, 2003

¹ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*, London, 1984, p. 92. The comment applied to both the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians.

² Julia Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History*, Madison, 1984, p. xi.

³ Deborah Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England*, Princeton, 1985, p. 79.

⁴ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, vol II, Cambridge, 1995, p. 140.

⁵ Keith Snell & Paul Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 136.

⁶ Delia Garrett, 'Primitive Methodist Circuits in the English-Welsh Borderland' in *Rural History* vol. 14, 1, Cambridge, 2003, p. 39.

In 1963, Edward Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* debunked the Whig triumphalist view of 19th-century Britain as a time and place of great social and economic progress widely shared: for many, progress was modest, and for too many, it was non-existent. It remains, for this writer, a tour de force that united impassioned history-writing and the rigorous deployment of primary sources. Yet in the case of the Primitive Methodism (henceforward, PM or Prims), the second principle was sacrificed to the first. Thompson, committed Marxist, but also a Methodist minister's son and ex-pupil of Kingswood, the Methodist boarding-school, claimed that Wesleyanism, most particularly among Evangelical churches, offered 'a chiasm of despair', a subtle form of bourgeois coercion visited upon the mass of the people, and he contrasted the Old Connexion unfavourably with the Prims. For him, their humble converts were the product, not of an elite preaching *at*, but of the poor preaching *to*, the poor.⁷ He was, alas, neither the first nor the last writer to paint them in such heroic terms.

The connexion came into being in the early summer of 1811, its constituent parts having emerged progressively over the four years since the holding of the first English camp-meeting on Mow Cop in May 1807. It was theologically indistinguishable from the old connexion – indeed the name was chosen (in 1812) to underline its claim to be the true inheritor of Wesley's mantle, and no doubt a riposte to the New Connexion.⁸ The points of difference were in liturgical style, thanks to a much greater commitment to expansive and emotional revivalism. Yet these were differences of maturation, political sophistication and followers' preference, not of essence.

⁷ Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, London, 1963: the 'chiasm of despair' occupies pp. 373-401; the most pointed PM comparison appears on p. 397.

⁸ The four tenets of Methodist belief – shared by Prims and Wesleyans alike – are debated in Stephen Hatcher, 'The Origin and Expansion of Primitive Methodism in the Hull Circuit, 1819-1851', PhD, Manchester, 1993, p. 250.

The two denominations shared a common journey, having begun as revivalist societies of the few, marked out by intense and close relationships within classes and bands linked by a small number of peripatetic preachers. These metamorphosed into preacher-led congregations organised in circuits but backed up by increasingly sophisticated administrative and publishing organisations; and although part-time unpaid lay preachers continued to provide the bulk of the labour, they continued to become fully-fledged churches led by a professional trained ministry. As agonised soul-searching slowly gave way to worship, bands did not long survive, and classes became increasingly formulaic. The love-feast's decline may have been partly out of hygienic concerns, but it also reflected the rising status of the clerical class: the love-feast was shared, but communion was administered. This common experience is not necessarily evident at first sight: by the time that the Prims came into being, the Wesleyans were well along the road.

Thompson's view of the founding impulse relied upon the account given in unpublished drafts of autobiography of the man generally seen as the chief founder, Hugh Bourne, sourced via the 1952 biography written by the Revd John Wilkinson, a self-confessed devotee and Methodist scholar, to mark the centenary of Bourne's death. Had the scepticism he employed elsewhere been in operation, Thompson might have wondered why Wilkinson had here rested upon the autobiographical account, but elsewhere referred to contemporaneous diaries. Although neither was published, they were accessible; both were available in transcription in a county archive before the end of the 1960s, and a detailed comparison of the two shows that the autobiographies were fatally flawed.⁹ In fairness, Thompson probably saw his case against the Wesleyans as resting upon other primary materials such as Cobbett's writings, and this was only secondary confirmation

⁹ John Wilkinson, *Hugh Bourne, 1772 – 1852*, London, 1952, pp. 21-32 formed Thompson's source; Wilkinson's view of Bourne in that work's introduction opens the next chapter, which includes a fuller comparative examination of the sources.

that the settled class differences of the two connexions in his boyhood had applied a century earlier. It is the first of many paradoxes about this movement: while later writers have often dismissed his characterisation of the Wesleyans, they have left the view of early Primitive Methodism used to castigate them largely unchallenged. While religious historians might argue that the general view of the academy is not one of uncritical acceptance of the Prims' own legends, the image offered in *published* writing about this movement over the ensuing half-century continues to be that it was the humble end of the Methodist social spectrum, itself the humbler end of the Nonconformist one; and that it prospered in adversity. That is the case even for the few historians who have engaged with the primary sources.¹⁰ It was the trigger for this research.

The image appealed to its followers at the time. The connexional magazines highlighted the few horror-stories as if they were commonplace, and the connexion's best-selling work of the early 1830s was a shocking account of how the preacher, John Nelson, and his wife were stoned so severely in Yorkshire that she miscarried.¹¹ In 1851 a slender volume by Thomas Church recounted the reception awaiting the typical PM preacher of earlier years;¹² while a written version of the 1909 PM Conference's Hartley Memorial Lecture celebrating the founding generations ran to five editions in its first year.¹³ None of these was a contemporary and balanced account. Each played to a readership's taste for past heroes who were latter-day disciples suffering for their faith, and in the first case did not

¹⁰ Werner, *History*, p. 166, dismissed the diaries as of little value; Tim Woolley's revisionist view of sources is considered in Chapter 5. The stances of the only other two writers found to have made substantive reference are discussed later in this chapter and in Chapter 5: W Reginald Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850*, London, 1972; John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism*, London, 1978.

¹¹ John Nelson, *An Extract from the Journal of Mr John Nelson, Preacher of the Gospel...from his Youth to the 42nd year of his Age, Written by Himself*, Bemersley, 1834.

¹² Thomas Church, *Gospel Victories, or Missionary Anecdotes of...Persecutions Endured by Primitive Methodist Preachers Between the Years 1812 and 1842*, London, 1851.

¹³ Joseph Ritson, *The Romance of Primitive Methodism*, London, 1909.

deal with a PM activist anyway: Nelson was a very early Wesleyan preacher.¹⁴ It will perhaps be observed that this merely confirms that the Prims were laying claim to John Wesley's legacy, which had been abandoned by the parent connexion; but it perhaps also signals that even by the early 1830s the Prims had insufficiently horrific stories of their own to satisfy their readers. Furthermore, the connexion produced more authoritative and well-sourced histories around the time of the Church and Ritson publications; but oddly, the colourful works – and the equally partisan early magazines – have not infrequently been preferred as sources. It is easy enough to visualise why followers and leaders alike mythologised the past; the more intriguing question is why subsequent historians have not challenged it more vigorously.

Bourne was single-handedly responsible for fashioning that image, believing that he had a divine mission which not only shaped his life but also how he recorded it. In the opening decade of the 19th century, he – at that time a millenarian – saw his religious conversion and that of others as part of the coming cataclysm, with himself as chief apostle.¹⁵ He painted himself and those who joined him in evangelistic efforts as the poor and oppressed, thus embodying the first and last beatitudes.¹⁶ This was reflected in the denominational material that he began to produce after recovery from a nervous breakdown. In it he consistently portrayed the Prims as his creation, and their emergence as a modern gospel. 19th century England was a latter-day Israel where the Prims followed Jesus' example, taking the Word of God where other churches would not or could not go. Later Prim writers accepted that, and wrote accordingly. Understanding the man and his discourse of heroic adversity are the subjects of Chapters 2 and 3; they are necessary

¹⁴ The others will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹⁵ For the sense of transforming empowerment that conversion could bring: David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London, 1989, p. 5.

¹⁶ The difference between Matthew's (5:3) and Luke's (6:20) versions of the first beatitude underline a theme that will develop in the thesis: the former is worded as 'poor in spirit', the latter, merely 'poor'.

precursors to interpreting the written record, and what subsequent investigators have made of it.

In this thesis, though, the movement's humbleness is not regarded as a given to be instanced by colourful example, but a research issue to be illuminated by a closer interrogation of connexional growth patterns, and of how contemporary third parties viewed them. One useful new source that enriches the latter comes from an analysis of local newspaper coverage; hitherto, historians have had to rely upon the Prims' reportage of others' views. These together suggest that the Prims' heyday arrived earlier, and was shorter, than is currently understood. The evidence and its implications are the subject of Chapter 4. Contemporaneous evidence begins to emerge, from this and other sources, from about 1819 onwards, but material from before that date is sparse. The only figure known to have maintained a diary during that period is Bourne, and he desisted on three occasions: from some date in 1807 to early 1808; from February 1812 to February 1813; and a period of about 6 months following his January 1819 breakdown. In addition, the diaries were censored following (and perhaps before) their acquisition by the Connexion in the late 1850s, with the result that the diaries from 1804-1807 and 1813-1816 are no longer extant, although some at least existed at the time of the first posthumous biography of Bourne in 1855.¹⁷ This absence, exacerbated by past self-censorship by men such as John Flesher, the second connexional editor,¹⁸ remains a niggling concern; and the reasons first for Bourne's temporary cessations of diary-keeping and the connexion's subsequent censorship of what he did write are, in the end, matters for reasoned speculation. That must recognise the pivotal significance of the missing periods: Bourne stopped recording at key times, but wrote retrospectively about each of them; the subsequent destruction of

¹⁷ John Walford, *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of the Late Venerable Hugh Bourne*, (2 vols), London, 1855/1856.

¹⁸ Flesher destroyed all of his personal papers towards the end of his life: Holliday B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church* (2 vols), London, c.1906, vol ii, p. 257.

materials *around* those dates raises the possibility that they offered an unwelcome challenge to the favoured retrospective account.

The first concerns the period around and leading up to the first camp-meeting on Mow Cop in May 1807. It is pivotal in the pre-history of Primitive Methodism; whatever theological significance the camp-meeting may have had – and evidence would suggest that while it was important to Bourne, it was much less so to others – its importance in terms of image, recruitment strategy and founding impetus was crucial. The second concerns the highly significant decision of the early movement to draw back from expansive revivalism, about which not only contemporaneous but also retrospective evidence is sparse. This vitally determines how we see the events of the entire 1811-1819 period, and no doubt largely as a consequence of that existing accounts have dealt with it impressionistically if at all. The only contemporary sources are a few preaching-plans, the partially-surviving diary account by Bourne and a pamphlet-length ‘history’ written by him in 1819 for magazine part-publication, plus the scant coverage in posthumous biographies of Bourne and William Clowes, eight years his junior, and now seen as the co-founder. He was converted during a revival that swept through the Potteries in 1804-5, and thereafter joined Bourne in first part-time and later full-time evangelism on the fringes of Wesleyan Methodism. Clowes’ published autobiography deals equally briefly with the period, while Bourne’s unpublished ones end before it. There were no newspaper stories to act as a counterweight until 1818. This thesis brings together the written materials and the scant, ill-attested, numbers for these years to resolve questions about our present understanding. Chapter 5 summarises these uncertainties and seeks to resolve them.

The position improves thereafter. From 1819, itinerants were required to maintain diaries, some of which appeared in connexional magazines; from 1820 an annual conference

recorded some information about the movement's progress, and baptismal registers began to be maintained; from 1837 civil registration provided a more assured form of tracking of individuals; 1841 saw the first named censuses; 1851's census added further key data; and finally in 1862 probate calendars began to be published in the wake of civil assumption of what had previously been a religious function, the oversight of disposal of estates. Yet until recently, the sheer mass of data often defied comprehension and analysis. Now, digitisation of such 19th-century records coupled with automatic search facilities make it feasible to root out, from over 15 million articles in 48 regional publications, the 40,000 or so newspaper stories about the movement, and to further refine these by date, time, place or type: for example, only about 1% of those stories deal with the period prior to 1840. What is now a task of a few weeks or months was previously that of several lifetimes. At the same time, the rising interest in family history has created a market based on vital registration data which can now be searched in increasingly flexible ways. Using these databases, social historians can trace someone from baptism in church or chapel registers via censuses through their lives to death and if they were sufficiently prosperous, to identify the proved value of their estate; and their employment status (and that of father and/or spouse) through that life as recorded in successive censuses is a further insight into their circumstances. Armed with enough names and locations, it is now possible to build a picture of the condition of a group of known individuals in a way that was impossible only a decade ago; and it is a process that is likely to expand. Under competitive pressure, the various commercial undertakings are adding to the data sources that can be searched, with significant datasets yet to be broached (e.g., poor rate schedules). In parallel with that, cooperative efforts undertaken on a non-commercial basis have created significant databases, as yet incomplete, either dealing with the genealogical or religious history of an area or with a specific topic such as church and chapel buildings. Bringing such data

together adds to the evidence that can only now begin to be deployed. It paints a very different picture of the early Prims.

Yet data unavailability only partly explains the historiographical conundrum. For example, if the more reliable PM works that so frequently act as proxies for absent primary sources are read as studies in source utilisation, they betray the selectivity that was the inevitable consequence of the discourse. Instead those few historians who have written about the Prims since 1959 have apparently read them as narratives showing the movement to have comprised those on the margins of society, ill-served by other churches. The humbleness hypothesis survives in the works of the few published writers on Primitive Methodism over the last half-century, even though it has been apparent for some time that the Prims did not penetrate the non-churchgoing strata; they succeeded by increasing the Methodist share in the existing marketplace. Similarly while the movement's early growth trajectory was unique and distinctive, the pattern of stasis and decline after Wesleyanism's Fly Sheets controversy of 1849 broadly mirrored the experience of other strands of Methodism.¹⁹ The same focus on class is maintained in the two substantial multi-denominational studies to appear towards the end of the period (all discussed below), and imbues the three most recent doctoral theses on PM in Britain.²⁰

¹⁹ Affiliation numbers for each strand of Methodism are given in Robert Currie, *Methodism Divided: A Study in the Sociology of Ecumenicalism*, London, 1968, p. 91; Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914*, London, 1976, p. 32, provides the GB component of that (erroneously described by him as 'England', although the Scottish proportion is negligible until the late Victorian period and his numbers are taken as a sufficient approximation for England and Wales). Translation of the latter to membership density (this writer's calculations, using the entire, not adult, population, as recorded in decennial censuses with quinquennial numbers estimated by interpolation) shows that the peak of PM membership density occurred no later than 1876. As discussed later (Chapter 4), however, a membership series understates the pace and extent of decline, because it fails to allow for hearer-member erosion.

²⁰ Wayne Johnson, 'In Triumph Of Faith: Primitive Methodism and the Labouring People in the North Midlands, 1812-62', PhD, Keele 1989; Hatcher, 'Origin and Expansion'; Delia Garrett, 'Primitive Methodism in Shropshire, 1820-1900', PhD, Leicester, 2002.

Thompson was not the first modern scholar to address the Prims. In 1957 Eric Hobsbawm had turned to and dismissed the Halévy thesis (that Methodism defused and diffused revolutionary forces among England's working class),²¹ although two years later he characterised the Prims as a peculiarly English form of social protest;²² but Thompson's elevation of the movement to heroic status was the pivotal step. His image was not noticeably softened in James Obelkevich's 1970s study of Methodism in rural north Lincolnshire. His stance is summed up in a single long paragraph, selectively reproduced here:

In response to the capitalist social order [PM] 'adaptively' provided an ethic of individual self-discipline and responsibility; but it also rejected the deferential dependence which the dominant classes sought to instil in the poor [by making] a symbolic, indirect critique of capitalist social relations. And a surrogate target was conveniently to hand in the Established Church [with its] etiquette of subordination, inhibition and decorum.

For him, this was a movement that ran out of steam when it gentrified, a process he saw as inherent to Methodism, and in the Prims' case having two key turning-points around 1840 and 1860.²³ These produced spiritual decay because a poor movement was saddled with the cost of supporting a chapel estate, which came to dominate its affairs. The appeal of self-respect is an important insight. However his contention that substituting the discipline of PM worship for that of Anglicanism was a subtle critique of the evils of capitalism is less persuasive than Julia Werner's 1980s view, in a work that remains the sole national history of the movement written since Edwardian times.²⁴ She argued that the Prims were largely indistinguishable in faith terms from the Wesleyans, and owed their success to the failure of the latter to proselytise the poorest fractions in society. The emotional noisy events were a pleasant diversion for many ordinary people, and the church was the low-

²¹ Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England*, Translated and edited by Bernard Semmel, Chicago, 1971.

²² Eric Hobsbawm, 'Methodism and the Threat of Revolution in Britain' in *History Today*, 7:2 (Feb., 1957) pp. 115-124; the same author, *Primitive Rebels*, Manchester, 1959.

²³ James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society South Lindsey, 1825-1875*, Oxford, 1976: quotation p. 157; periodisation p. 220ff.

²⁴ Although since her coverage ends very early, she had a particularly pronounced source problem.

cost operator in its marketplace. It achieved lower burdens of church membership by using unpaid or poorly-paid preachers drawn from the milieu of the congregation. So the connexion was a working-class church first opportunistically, as the Wesleyans drew back from revivalism in the post-Napoleonic years; and second by default in that its congregations were self-selecting among those most attracted by its style and accessibility of worship. Yet some aspects of this rest on her emphasis on Wesleyanism's alleged abandonment of the poor in the post-Napoleonic era.²⁵ Both the periodisation and abandonment claims need to be tested against the numbers.

Rodney Ambler, like Obelkevich, addressed only a single locality, in his case the Holland and Kesteven divisions of Lincolnshire. For him, what marked the Prims out was their attractive blend of folk-religion and Methodism; by embracing 'unconventional spirituality' the movement appealed to country people who inhabited a world of evil spirits, whereas more genteel denominations – including the Wesleyans – were hostile to such ideas. Methodist itinerancy, coupled with emotional worship, completed the formula for rural success. One important claim by him is that the inchoate movement had in Tunstall, the home circuit and then its spiritual home, 'a strong impetus to consolidate existing work based on sound organisation and a diligent pastorate working through established societies', and that this was opposed by Bourne while supported by Clowes.²⁶ This is at odds with the character and behaviour of the two men, even if in accordance with the retrospective account; but the claim usefully underlines the importance of the shadowy years to 1819.

²⁵ Werner, *History*, passim; Wesleyan abandonment, pp. 19-20.

²⁶ Rodney Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817-1875*, Hull, 1989, p. 28ff. The quoted words are from p. 31.

The last two writers deal with the Prims in the context of Nonconformity at large, and thus expose only inferentially their view of the movement. In both cases, it is their description of the PM chapels that best encapsulates it. Michael Watts saw the Prims as the low end of the Nonconformist spectrum, with its chapels substantially cheaper than the competition (in the context of seeking to arrive at an average for Nonconformity as a whole).²⁷ Keith Snell and Paul Ell asserted five years later that the smaller PM chapels were more appealing to 'lower social classes' and were 'consistent with a more participatory and democratic church'.²⁸

Common to each of these, the proletarian nature of the movement is taken to be almost a given, which can be sufficiently confirmed by modest examination or by notable examples, and those writing after 1984 did so without much heeding Hempton's view. Neither he nor Reginald Ward, having rescued Methodism from the accusation of bourgeois conspiracy, could also achieve the rehabilitation of the Prims. Here, the Halévy thesis has much to answer for. While one author narrowly extracted its less polemical aspects,²⁹ others continue to nod to it more or less approvingly;³⁰ and those who ignore it (Ambler and Watts, for example) appear generally sympathetic. It may well be the case that many historians treat it as a tired but interesting curiosity, but the weight of published views in PM histories does not lean towards those of Robert Moore;³¹ and a broad sympathy towards Halévy's claim would explain the paradoxical Thompson legacy. If the Prims separated from Wesleyanism on class grounds, that alone was sufficient context for the movement. This would produce the gulf between the optimistic certainties in the

²⁷ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 223-234, and pp. 604-605.

²⁸ Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 136ff; the quotation is from p. 139.

²⁹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 53; the same author, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914*, London, 1982, makes no reference to it.

³⁰ Two among several other examples: Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. xii; Deryck Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830*, 1988, p. 14.

³¹ Robert Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics: The Effects of Methodism in a Durham Mining Community*, Cambridge, 1974, pp. 5-8.

remainder of the opening quotations, and Hempton's careful doubts. This writer shares Hempton's stance.

For Ward, Methodism had to be rooted in the fate of Anglicanism. In late Georgian Britain, uniquely, the state chose to redefine and narrow the concept of establishment, so that it meant different things in the four nations of the (soon to be) United Kingdom. In effect, Britain privatised church modernisation two centuries before the Thatcher era, and it began in England from about 1780 onwards. Its established church was ill-equipped to deal with what he called the 'outpouring of undenominational religion', and was unprepared for the consequences when the English clergy bolstered the magistracy as the gentry abdicated its traditional functions.³² The state had inadvertently turned watered-down establishment into favoured denominationalism: it was institutional failure by state and church alike. Yet while his tracing of the process is impeccable, there are two objections to parts of his judgement. First, if establishment could not be enforced on the three countries of Great Britain in the reign of Queen Anne, it is hard to imagine how it might have been done in four in the troubled period after 1789.³³ Second, the state's non-enforcement was a 'failure' only against a medieval standard, not that of a post-Reformation world. By 1800 the state acted out of enlightened self-interest, not religious commitment, strengthening itself by weakening its established churches. In a later essay, Ward would chart out in more detail the nineteenth-century implications of this eighteenth-century departure: the financial and social impacts of enclosure on squirearchy and clerical incomes; the social and economic consequences of industrial growth, in particular the economic cycle; the increasingly salient and linked problems of non-

³² Ward, *Religion and Society*: that Britain was a 'weak' state because it was unable to enforce religious uniformity is widely developed through the book, but its core lies in the introduction (p. 1ff); the consequence was that private societies were the natural vehicle for promoting religious activism. The quoted words in the text are on p. 2.

³³ Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age: England 1603-1714*, 2nd Edition, London, 1994, p. 404ff.

residency and plurality in the established church; and the rising assertiveness of the Nonconformists, especially of new Dissent, in keeping with their rapid growth.³⁴

In the work from which the opening quotation was culled, David Hempton offered a more pointed perspective on the growth of Methodism: for him, the geographic, social and political variability of Methodism warned against simplistic generalisations or inflexible analysis. Two crucial assertions were firstly that Methodist success (and here it is important to note that his view is panoramic, and not necessarily applicable to the Prims) was not class-driven: indeed 'feudal' explanations worked very much better than elite-bourgeois-proletarian models for their comparative performance in different community types, e.g., new industrial villages in comparison with closed rural villages; or occupational groups, e.g., independent artisans in comparison with domestic servants. Secondly, the success hinged upon religious zeal: opportunism played a part, as did the wider environmental factors alluded to by Ward; but he was resistant to what he saw as the tendency of social historians to impose 'inflexible models on the relationship between religion and social change'.³⁵

OTHER SCEPTICAL VOICES

The two writers were not, though, the sole challengers to the hegemony of the class perspective. Although Richard Carwardine sought to link the transatlantic influences in the late 1970s,³⁶ other accounts of North American revivalism offer little support to the notion of the Prims as a 'democratic' religious phenomenon. While the American camp-

³⁴ W Reginald Ward, 'Church and Society in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol 2, London, 1978, pp. 11-96.

³⁵ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, passim; the quotation is from p. 27.

³⁶ Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865*, Westport, 1978.

meeting was the immediate inspiration for the PM version, and the Prims in turn are typically seen as having sprung from the camp-meeting movement, the English camp-meeting was a pale imitation of the American original: it did not entail camping-out for the attenders, even when the event spilled over to a second or third day; and more crucially, it did not feature the same degree of large-scale manifestations of altered states of consciousness, which were replicated when the initiative was transferred to Canada.³⁷ Both in Kentucky and Atlantic Canada, the same *communitas*,³⁸ the temporary suspension of normal social rules and structures within which conversion was more likely to be experienced, or in the case of Baptists confirmed, was common. In Britain, it was as likely to develop outside the camp-meeting, with two PM preachers, John Benton and John Wedgwood, being notable exponents;³⁹ and the camp-meeting rapidly metamorphosed from recruiting medium to outdoor congregational commemoration.⁴⁰ This is all of a piece with what happened with other later US imports: Britain's free churches were happy enough to use US methods and celebrities to boost their market share, but failed to integrate the organisational responsiveness upon which their effectiveness and longevity depended. Indeed the tension between clericism and revivalism sometimes produced outright proscriptions.⁴¹ Even when accepted, American fundamentals were British fads, and genuine revivals occurred beyond the control of the churches, rather than being central to their mission.⁴² It is no accident that the only place in Britain where revivalism was

³⁷ Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion : The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism*, Knoxville, 1999, pp. 187ff; George Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812*, Kingston Ontario, 1994, pp. 147-161.

³⁸ Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, p. 225ff; Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, London, 1969, pp. 131-133.

³⁹ Rawlyk, *Canada Fire*, pp. 173, 181; British exponents – see Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 97, 512; US Baptist cases were restricted to specific congregations – Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, p. 200.

⁴⁰ Gerald Parsons, *Religion in Victorian Britain, I: Traditions*, pp. 217-223. He asserts (p. 215) that Primitive Methodism had lost much of its revivalist edge by the 1850s; a contemporary activist dated it at least two decades earlier – Thomas Russell, *The Writings of Thomas Russell*, London, 1890, p. 95. The example of the Ramsor camp-meetings – where five were held in under two years between 1809 and 1811, and the 1814 event was attended by 19 PM preachers in what was more reunion than external event – indicates that the seeds of the move were present very early (Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 87-98, also see Chapter 5 re 1814).

⁴¹ Wesleyans, 1847 (Parsons, *Traditions*, p. 85); Prims, 1862 (Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 185).

⁴² Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859-1905*, Dublin, 2000, pp. 3-17.

genuinely integral to a denomination was Cornwall; with weak establishment, the normative church was Wesleyan, and cycles of revivalism were targeted not at the outsider but the hesitant insider.⁴³

A key difference between American and English experience here hinges on the word 'democratic'. As Hatch argues, American religious organisations were often autocratically administered; but they were democratically responsive to the liturgical and theological demands of the followers.⁴⁴ The Prims were neither. They earned the label thanks firstly to their particular settlement of the lay-clerical power contention, and secondly to the inability of the central body to enforce its wishes upon districts and circuits. The first was not 'democratic' anyway, being designed to limit the theological ascendancy of the itinerant; and the second was a by-product of tensions between the two men now seen as the co-founders. Historians have tended to focus on the denomination's manifest different-ness, rather than the underlying similarities with its contemporaries implied by the foregoing.

Quietly questioning voices were also detectable, from an unexpected source. By the 1950s, Methodist scholars were beginning to accept that their discretion over flaws in the historical account – in particular the beatification of Bourne – had placed Methodist well-being ahead of historical accuracy. Two articles in 1956 – while restrained in their conclusions, unequivocal as to the passage of events – showed that James Bourne, Hugh's younger, worldier brother, had been gouging the connexion for years by overcharging for printing, while another official had obtained loans approaching £1000 firstly from book-room funds and when they were exhausted, from the itinerant preachers' insurance fund

⁴³ David Luker, 'Revivalism in Theory and Practice: the Case of Cornish Methodism', in *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1986, p. 608ff.

⁴⁴ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, New Haven, 1989, passim, but especially pp. 4/5 and 125-133.

controlled by James. John Flesher, Bourne's nominated successor as Editor, arrived in the Potteries to discover that the Bournes were not held in high esteem locally, and that James was regarded as a man on the make. The removal of the book-room to London was a direct response to that. In the 1970s, a later writer attempted to argue that the Bourne-Clowes estrangement was due to Clowes' financial irregularities – he withheld funds due to the book-room and used them to hire more preachers – but succeeded only in showing that Hugh Bourne committed the most forgivable of sins: he trusted his brother when wisdom dictated otherwise.⁴⁵ By the 1990s, one Methodist's doctoral thesis contended that Bourne's 1819 breakdown marked the onset of a developing paranoia, although a forthcoming thesis by another ordained Methodist may date mental decline to a rather later date.⁴⁶ It is another paradox of Primitive Methodism that a failure of early Methodist scholarship has imbued our modern perspectives while better recent works have not. This is still, if the weight of publication is representative, a church of the humble brought into being by people whose minor failings are to be forgiven as the price of their great strengths.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The course of research was undertaken thanks to the present writer's doubts about the adequacy of our understanding of the Prims' origins. This mirrored Hempton's worries, and the research approach similarly reflected shared concerns about 'inflexible models'. It was informed by three particular perspectives. First, it rejects the postmodern critique.

⁴⁵ Frank Baker, 'James Bourne and the Bemersley Book-Room' in PWHS, XXX, part 7, pp. 138-150; the same author, 'John Flesher and the Bemersley Book-Room' in PWHS, XXX, part 8, pp. 171-178, both 1956; and Leonard Brown, 'Hugh Bourne, a Bicentenary Reflection' in PWHS XXXVIII, part 5, 1972, pp. 121-124.

⁴⁶ Hatcher, PM in Hull, pp. 203, 205; Timothy Woolley, 'A New Appearance on the Face of Things?': Aspects of the Primitive Methodist Creation Narrative (Cliff College, forthcoming). An article from the latter will be cited and discussed in Chapter 5.

That would hold that Primitive Methodist history is an object-lesson in all that is wrong with the discipline: it purports to explain the past, when in reality it explains and justifies the present.⁴⁷ Yet the mind-set that questions sources and thinks the unthinkable is a refreshing alternative. So even though Derrida argued that his postmodern concepts cannot be used as methods,⁴⁸ his argument is self-defeating.⁴⁹ Callum Brown's view of empiricism is equally applicable to postmodernism: it is valid to reject it as a philosophical system, but to embrace its techniques within another.⁵⁰ The postmodernist position may be a reasonable critique of some history-writing, but not of *history*. Its capacity to expose the power and prevalence of discourse is a valid and valuable contribution; but it may be had without having to accept the accompanying claim that there is nothing beyond the text, and that context is today's imposition on yesterday. Therein lies the second perspective.

Hempton's discomfort with existing accounts of the Prims and Bible Christians sits within a wider nomothetic-idiographic debate. Few historians would disagree with Arno Mayer's assertion that our understanding of the past is determined by broad 'organising generalizations and principles' that illuminate and contextualise the evidence, leading to 'comprehensive historical vision'; the problem is in deciding the extent to which it does so, and how or whether the evidence itself should influence the organising frameworks and concepts.⁵¹ David Vincent was clearer about the nature of these when he observed that

⁴⁷ In a synthesis of the work of Derrida and his apologists, Keith Jenkins, *On What is History: from Carr and Elton to Rorty and White*, London, 1995, goes further, arguing that it is in any case impossible to achieve anything else, because the past is meaningless.

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Letter to a Japanese Friend' (Professor Izutsu), in David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, (eds) *Derrida and Différance*, Warwick, 1985, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Derrida and others cannot simultaneously argue the death of the author (i.e., that the reader cannot be constrained from making what he or she will of any text) and, uniquely, patent the use of their material.

⁵⁰ Callum Brown, *Postmodernism for Historians*, Harlow, 2005, p. 23ff.

⁵¹ The issue was discussed in a joint introductory essay by Arthur Marwick and Clive Emsley to Arthur Marwick et al., (eds) *Total War and Historical Change: Europe 1914-1955*, with the quotations repeated from Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe and the Great War*, London, 1981, p. x.

The historian must organize his interpretation according to a set of implicit or explicit assumptions about the nature and significance of the past.⁵²

It is clearly right to argue that the facts do not speak for themselves; that we have no choice but to assemble the evidence thanks to a framework of understandings and beliefs, and only out of that find meaning; but the problem is how to ensure that the framework contextualises the evidence, without ending up selecting and shaping it too. If it does, what we 'see' is what we brought to the evidence, not vice-versa – the postmodern critique in lay language. The aim here has been a minimal explanatory framework fitted to the evidence, not the other way round, in the belief that a sceptical approach to sources, plus appropriately rigorous methodology, will deliver a more thorough consideration of the context, and that in turn will provide a better understanding of the content.

The third perspective concerns the apparent nature of much of the twentieth-century academic attention to religious history. That has been sociological in character, concerned with the collective at the expense of the individual dimensions, and a fair number of writers make that explicit.⁵³ Even when there is no direct reference to sociological works, the influence is only too apparent.⁵⁴ In this research, while recognising the value of sociological precepts, the present writer sought to prevent them from crowding out others.

⁵² David Vincent, *Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Working Class Autobiography*, London, 1981, pp. 11-12.

⁵³ For example, Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, pp. 28-29, cites Durkheim and another lesser-known writer; Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives*, Buxton, 2001, rests his entire analysis on a work of synthesis that brings together a much wider body of sociological scholarship (Daniel Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1962); Eslinger, as previously cited, quotes sociological writers (and anthropological ones too, via a series of essays, Michael Banton, (ed.) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, London, 1966); Moore (in *Pitmen, Preachers and Politics*, pp. 19-27) uses Weber's categorisations; Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution*, London, 1974, pp. 6-8 cites de Tocqueville; Obelkevich, *Rural Society*, p. ix, asserts via Feuerbach that 'the secret of theology is anthropology'; Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 9-10, recasts Marx; and Kenneth Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England*, London, 1963, opens the work with a quotation from Troeltsch.

⁵⁴ Notably in Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 1976, p. vii, which states that the work addresses 'religion specifically as a social phenomenon'. Interestingly, his stance was dismissed as 'sociological determinism' in Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850-1914*, London, 1995, p.4.

So in engaging with the characters of the Prims' past, the aim was to understand them as individuals as well as members of this or that group or class.

This thesis therefore rejects postmodernism as a world-view, but seeks pragmatically to apply its concepts and methods, approaching the evidence empirically and sceptically. It sets out to avoid Hempton's 'inflexible models', by embracing a deliberately modest one to interpret the growth and decline of Primitive Methodism, and it is intentionally accommodating to an individualist perspective. Ironically in view of the foregoing, it first appeared in a sociological work that sprang from the secularisation school. Seeking to understand why religious organisations grew and declined at different rates, Robert Currie argued that their organisational characteristics alone did not suffice but also were determined by how individuals chose to enter or remain in membership of them. To paraphrase, he offered the following four-state affiliation model:

Figure 1

External, disinclined	>	External, interested	>	Internal, uncommitted	>	Internal, committed
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Here, recruitment was not a simple two-state process, but rather one of courtship, of progressive alignment, in which there might be failures, temporary setbacks, estrangements, and irreparable separations, and the retention dynamic would change over time.⁵⁵ Each of these three transitions represented an increasing degree of commitment by the faithful and an opportunity for losses, but also a different organisational requirement, and it explains a paradox that sects bent on growth both can and must be simultaneously introspective yet outgoing. It requires that they be expansively public in the first domain; guardedly welcoming in the second when potential recruits may sample the experience of worship; yet demanding and prescriptive to those whose membership requires behavioural

⁵⁵ Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert, and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 5-9 and p. 54ff.

compliance, itself a reward and reinforcement to fellow-members. The model sharpens the question about this movement implicit in the revisiting of its nature: given that there was a rising demand for organised religion in Britain at this time, why did it so rapidly out-perform its competitors; and equally, why did it then encounter stasis so early? It does not rule out class as an energising principle; but nor does it enshrine that at the centre of its explanatory framework.

A second 'generalization and principle' has been adopted: while denominational accounts offer a wealth of chronological facts, it is essential to take a sceptical approach to *explanations* based on them, the dangers of which are neatly captured in an introductory essay to a 1909 history of Methodism.

That the forces which underlie the activities of men are not blind, but rather are moving towards some goal that as yet we do not see, by ways which we cannot always discern, is, to the Christian at all events, a self-evident truth. If we cannot prove this conclusion from our incomplete survey of history itself, we deduce it from the fundamental premises of our faith.⁵⁶

That mind-set produced the Prims' religious allegory of humble activists and powerful opponents; and those who approach their works failing to discount the writers' motives can only too easily read them as unwitting testimony of social contention. However inadvertent the social dimension of the allegory, it was not created unwittingly.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Both Ward and Hempton identified the 1790s as a time when increasing religiosity collided with the suddenly-prominent issues of church-state relations and the weakness of the established church.⁵⁷ Calvinistic Methodism had introduced the itinerancy model, but

⁵⁶ W. J. Townsend, H. B. Workman, and G. Eayrs, (eds), *A New History of Methodism*, London, 1909, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Ward, *Religion and Society*, 1972, p. 53; Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, 1984, p. 56

bodies hamstrung by strict Calvinist doctrine or the rigid parish system could not respond to rising population and geographic shifts of the period caused by industrialisation and urbanisation, so the new message was delivered mainly from the fringes of or splinters from them; and it found a willing audience. The Wesleyan itinerancy model was more flexible than that of New Dissent though, because it initially separated the pastoral and recruitment roles;⁵⁸ and it prospered accordingly. Attempts to control or suppress it were futile, in large part because the state pragmatically chose to appease both sides. It needed the political support of the established church and its adherents, but also the economic support of the Dissenters who dominated English commerce. For this writer, that is the preferred reading of the failure of the Sidmouth Bill closely followed by the repeals of the Five Mile and Conventicle Acts, and aligns with Hempton's observation that 'the government was more interested in encouraging Anglican reform than in penalizing Dissenters.'⁵⁹ Not all writers would agree however: Ward could still assert that the subsequent 1828 legal easements of dissenting disabilities were 'the first and most surprising blow to the old constitution'.⁶⁰

That view would have been understood by contemporary Wesleyans: the legislative easements following the defeat of the Sidmouth Bill were themselves followed by Luddism, the Pentrich uprising and Peterloo; and meanwhile after a quarter-century of more or less unbroken progress – and the signal failure of schisms to prosper – the annual returns for the years astride the unleashing of the dragoons at St Peter's Field in Manchester showed a serious hiatus in recruitment.⁶¹ The previous two years had seen decisions about itinerant funding that might have been expected to slow growth down, but instead the numbers showed worrying declines. Simultaneously, a competitor that had

⁵⁸ Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People*, p. 22ff and p. 163.

⁵⁹ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ Ward, *Religion and Society*, 1972, p. 114.

⁶¹ Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 141.

appeared negligible and confined to North Staffordshire suddenly emerged as a small but fast-growing threat. It could not be ignored; but nor could the potential wrath of a state that had proved itself willing to deploy blunt measures; and the old connexion acted accordingly. For Werner, when the 1820 Wesleyan Conference referred to the need to undertake revivals conducted with “deep solemnity”, to make pastoral progress but in a “*gradual* way”, and camp-meetings to be held, but under another name,⁶² she read this as the pusillanimity that had allowed the Prims to prosper. More reasonably, this was a radical policy shift dressed up as a show of loyalty. As with the Wesleyan boasts that they civilised and pacified the unruly working classes, the rhetoric was directed to reassuring an external audience, the state; it was not a set of principles for future Wesleyan revivalism. As will be seen in chapters 2 and 4, the seeds of PM success had been sown before 1818; and the continuing domination of Methodist recruitment by the old connexion is a more reliable guide to its intentions and actions than its Conference rhetoric.⁶³

The insensitivity of that rhetoric to the views of the membership reflects the seriousness of the leadership’s dilemma. Cobbett might bewail events in Methodism, and call upon the rank-and-file to vote with their feet; but he was targeting the wrong people.⁶⁴ He might have done better addressing those who were of real concern to the Methodist Conference: the laymen who had lost organisational power or influence over the preceding generation. Raising itinerants’ status was no more than a contributory part of the real agenda – the securing of the position of the Legal Hundred and the inner counsels of the movement that sat within it. Many among the small minority of preachers who attended that 1820

⁶² Werner, *History*, pp. 19-20.

⁶³ The Old Connexion grew by an average of about 5,500 pa during this period; all of its Methodist competitors combined managed a figure around 4,100 pa – Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 1976, p. 31. Furthermore, Wesleyan growth figures for 1821 and 1822 are incompatible with unsteady recovery from a damaging setback: the sudden return to high annual growth (as referenced in fn19) is more suggestive of withheld recruitment.

⁶⁴ Thompson, *English Working Class*, 1963, pp. 395-6 and 399, considers Cobbett’s efforts, but the numbers (preceding footnote) confirm that the ordinary laity did not comply.

Conference would remember that only thirty-odd years earlier, Wesley had been in the habit of inviting most itinerants to attend, and allowed attendance at the bulk of the business by prosperous laymen, their wives, and some preachers' wives too.⁶⁵ In one generation, attendance had fallen in absolute terms (from 150 to under 100) and contracted dramatically in proportionate terms, from three-quarters of all itinerants in 1784 to one in three in the year the Legal Hundred took over his mantle, and was below one in seven a quarter-century after Wesley's death.⁶⁶ Having seen the movement almost quadruple in three decades, the 1820 Conference was less worried about the loyalty of the mass of the membership than of those who might mount a leadership challenge.

In this broader sense, then, what was happening within Wesleyanism *was* crucial. Between 1790 and 1815 approximately, a unique conjunction had been created: not only was Methodism enabled to grow at an unprecedented rate by external factors; but also the process of securing the movement in the aftermath of Wesley's death was likely to generate internal challengers, and the growth meant that those challengers had the best chance to get a foothold. The men at the 1820 Conference knew that the New Connexion was still their biggest challenger, accounting for 5% of the Methodist connexional total; but they also understood the risk posed by the Prims and Bible Christians. They acted none too soon, because the upstarts' 4% share of the Methodist market in 1820 had doubled within a further year, hitting 20% by 1836; and 28% in 1861. That was nearly the limit of their progress in share terms,⁶⁷ and the engaging question is why, of all the challengers, it was the Prims who were by some margin the most successful.

⁶⁵ John Lenton, *John Wesley's Preachers*, Milton Keynes, 2009, p. 160.

⁶⁶ Itinerant numbers for 1790 exceeded 300 (Lenton, *Ibid.*) and by 1816 exceeded 700 (*Minutes of Methodist Conference...vol IV*, London, nd but c.1818, p. 228).

⁶⁷ They peaked at 30% in 1886, falling to 29.4% in 1906 – this writer's calculations on Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, 1976, p. 31.

Currie's affiliation model points to the likely explanation. It was due to their ability, more than any other competitor, to deploy the right mechanisms in each of his three transitions, and thereby to bind the faithful more securely to their church. They generated awareness and publicity via their Ranter image, street preaching, communal singing and camp-meetings which enabled them to outperform in moving the disinclined into the potentially interested group; the combination of low barriers to attendance at worship, the modest status of their preachers, a lack of central control that allowed flexible responses to local realities, and a heightened sense of community made it easier for the potentially interested to sample what was on offer and to make that offer more immediately relevant; the drama of their worship practice pulled more people across the commitment boundary to membership; and the active nature of that membership – because the Prims *performed* rather than merely consumed their worship – welded the faithful to the movement.

This was hard for any fully-fledged competitor formed by the mass defection of preachers, officials and followers, such as the New Connexion, to achieve; and even the Bible Christians never achieved the scale or geographic dispersion that would produce local diversity. The Prims, however, produced the required conjunction: a critical mass of local activists committed to revivalism; a set of modestly prosperous lay supporters; a peculiarly helpful geography; and a welcoming religious marketplace. As will be debated later, Tunstall offered just the right place for that to occur; and just the right people emerged to enact it. The key to PM success was the assembly of exactly the right ingredients at just the right time to appeal to a specific group of people. The key to their early stasis was their failure to expand that appeal to other groups.

This thesis will set out the evidence that calls for a new orthodoxy about Primitive Methodism's early character and growth profile. It will consider first Hugh Bourne's life, because his was the pivotal contribution, and then examine how his written style came to dominate how events were historicised. It will consider how numerical evidence underlines the significance of the uncertainties about the pre-1819 period, while later numbers and newspaper evidence call both the denomination's self-image and the usually-adopted periodisation models into question. Having done so, it will use the scant evidence (not previously examined) to offer a revised understanding of the period 1811-1819. These form the platform for more detailed investigations of the social character of the people who formed this movement: the followers, and some lay officials, in baptismal register analyses and the returns to the 1851 Religious Census; inferentially via a study of their chapel-building activity; and finally by tracking the socio-economic position of trustees and local officials via employment analyses, and the itinerants and senior connexional lay leadership via their census entries and probate records. These will show that our modern understanding meshes very closely with the movement's self-image, but rather poorly with the reality. The process will also point to the likely but ill-recognised discontinuities in the movement's social trajectory that allowed this to remain undetected for so long.

No servant of Christ ever laboured more ardently for the spread of the Gospel than did Hugh Bourne.¹

John Wilkinson, 1952

Hugh Bourne, the earnest mill-wright and joiner...who founded the Primitive Methodists...²

Edward Thompson, 1963

The camp-meetings were denounced...and their chief instigator, the carpenter Hugh Bourne was expelled...³

Michael Watts, 1995

Over the past two centuries, Hugh Bourne has rightly been recognised as the chief founder of the Primitive Methodist Connexion. The scale of his practical contribution is not in much dispute; but his more insidious one was to create a template by which he, and others who had shared his conversion experience, saw the movement as a modern gospel. This chapter examines, via his life-history, how and why he did it.

Bourne came from a family of farmers and traders.⁴ His grandfather farmed near Stoke-on-Trent; his father Joseph, having made money trading, became a farmer nearby at Fordhays (now Ford Hayes) around 1760. Hugh was born there in 1772 and completed his schooling aged 12, by which time he had mastered Latin and acquired a working knowledge of science and mathematics. He was a bright pupil (in later life he was self-taught in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic), and in some farming families he would have been their passport to gentility, via Oxbridge and a suitable clerical appointment. Not for Bourne; he was removed from school, and later apprenticed to an uncle, an agricultural engineer. The decision was not economically-induced: Joseph made enough money at

¹ Wilkinson, *Bourne*, p. 7.

² Thompson, *English Working Class*, 1963, p. 397.

³ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 32.

⁴ The chronology of Bourne's life is generally non-contentious, and rests on Kendall's *History* (as in this case), or Walford, *Life*. It would be unduly laborious to read if cited line by line. Where however it is open to interpretation or dispute, plus those facts resting upon other materials, the source will be cited individually.

Ford Hayes to move in 1788 to a larger farm at Bemersley, about three miles from Tunstall, the most northerly Potteries town, and to rent pews in two parish churches.⁵

Bourne was first exposed to dissenting literature by his mother, and while continuing to accompany her to Anglican worship, he began to seek out a more satisfying, and rigorous, religious outlet. He fell in with Methodists, and was captivated.⁶ In 1800, he wrote a manuscript account of his conversion experience the previous year, which states that he suffered religious anxieties from childhood; if so his dread of dying in a sinful state was not puberty-related.⁷ His anxieties about the state of his soul did not lessen as he moved into adult life, and he found few companions who shared his distaste for the drinking and profanity of fellow-workers. By his late twenties, Bourne had become a timber trader, and one purchase of standing timber at nearby Harriseahead brought him into contact with its coal-miners. He saw them as a community that needed to be saved; he progressively abandoned commerce and devoted himself to his faith. By about 1803 Bourne was effectively a full-time freelance evangelist, if a rather odd one. He was intensely shy, and would not willingly preach. When pressed to do so, he spoke with one hand, fingers splayed, covering his face; it cannot have been great oratory.⁸ It helps to explain why his preferred ministry was 'conversation preaching' – one-to-one conversations with the anxious designed to promote conversion; why his preferred devotions were love-feasts and classes; yet also why he was attracted by mass outdoor preaching. All allowed this shy inhibited man the emotional release he craved. He was no less consistent an advocate of

⁵ The Hugh Bourne Papers, MARC, Bourne Autobiography, C Text, DDHB/2/3, p. 3. Archive references DDHB/2/1 to 2/3 contain three versions of autobiography. They are henceforward cited as Bourne A, B or C Text plus folio number: see Appendix re designations.

⁶ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 10, 15.

⁷ The Hugh Bourne Papers, MS 'Self Review', an account of his conversion dated 17th August 1800: MARC, DDHB/2/6 (henceforward, Bourne Self Review).

⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 35 footnote; Bourne B Text, p. 12; both are discreet. For a more frank appraisal, see John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, from its Origin to the Conference of 1860, the First Jubilee Year of the Connexion*, London, 1860, p. 427.

establishing settled homes for his congregations though, and spent his own money to that end.

Bourne claimed the credit for the revivalist style at Harriseahead,⁹ but it occurred within the context of the waves of revivalism sweeping across Methodism, which had a crucial sub-text: the tension between clerical (hence connexional) authority and individual inspiration. William Bramwell, a Wesleyan itinerant, was a key revivalist figure. His example prompted splinters, notably in West Yorkshire and Manchester, and spawned groups that occupied a spectrum of fringe congregations. One of Bramwell's admirers, John Grant, arrived as a preacher in the Burslem circuit in 1802;¹⁰ and a group known as the Stockport Revivalists were active around Congleton in 1804. Bourne was one of a number of Staffordshire Methodists who attended a pivotal love-feast there in September that year.¹¹ By 1805, the revivalists included James Steele, a long-serving Wesleyan local preacher, and one of his class-members, a mildly dissolute young man, William Clowes. Clowes began to work only part-time to allow himself more opportunity to evangelise, and he and Bourne became allies. Their travels brought them into contact with the leaders of fringe groups as they learned their adopted trade, and two would prove important: Peter Phillips, Warrington businessman, Quaker Methodist and advocate of free gospel and sober deportment; and James Crawford, leader of the Magic Methodists of Delamere, inspired preacher and believer in visions. Bourne was initially more taken with the former, but came to admire the latter – until a parting of the ways.¹²

⁹ Discussed at length: Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 31-38.

¹⁰ Bourne B Text, p. 21.

¹¹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 43.

¹² Bourne's Journals for the period are not extant. Walford, *Life*, ii, p. 143 quotes a lost entry for 28th June 1807 that Bourne initially disliked Crawford; the later Journal (E f. 213, 14th January 1810) shows his change of heart.

Bourne's revivalist preferences aroused the resentment of the Wesleyan local preachers, who had not been won over by Grant.¹³ Yet the circuit authorities could not easily eject a layman who was the funder and trustee of Harriseahead chapel. Bourne progressively abandoned Methodist discipline, failing to meet his financial and attendance obligations at the Ridgway class – although he was undertaking class-leader functions by rotation at Harriseahead.¹⁴ In early 1807 Lorenzo Dow, renegade American Methodist, arrived in the area. He had been touring Britain and Ireland, preaching wherever he could find a welcoming pulpit, and his messages were revivalism, republicanism, and congregational independence. Wesleyan authorities facing a reactionary state at war with godless and republican France were rightly worried; but Bourne was so impressed that he travelled to Congleton to hear him a second time, purchasing some of Dow's pamphlets – the means by which he supported himself on his travels – particularly being attracted by the one on camp-meetings.¹⁵ Recent scholarship has provided a useful précis. Religious provision in recently-settled areas of Kentucky was inadequate, and the churches promoted open-air multi-congregational events to run after the harvest; an echo of mass events such as those at Cambuslang and Kingswood, but here conducted within, not beyond, the churches. Furthermore, the hot-house atmosphere was intensified by worshipping for days on end, often well into the night. Lay initiative had turned them into protracted sessions by camping out; the chance presence of an Arminian Methodist preacher transformed a Presbyterian 'sacramental occasion' into a mass conversion event. Canadian Methodists copied the formula. Yet the phenomenon was not unique to the camp-meeting: the 'rage

¹³ Hugh Bourne, *The Journals of Hugh Bourne*, MARC, DDHB/3/1/a, 21st, 23rd February 1803. For form of subsequent citations, see Appendix.

¹⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 33,36.

¹⁵ William Clowes, *The Journals of William Clowes, A Primitive Methodist Preacher...* (edited John Davison), London, 1844, p. 67; Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 58 ff. The two sources (there being no extant Bourne Journal) differ in minor detail. Dow, L., *Perambulations of Cosmopolite...*, New York, 1855, p. 213, is not helpful.

for dipping' that emerged in Atlantic Canada and Kentucky featured the same altered states of consciousness.¹⁶

The camp-meeting had complex attractions for Bourne: emotional intensity; a rival to Wakes bacchanalia; and support for the Sabbatarian campaign under way in Tunstall. This had been set up by William Clowes, who had sought and gained the support (until the licensed trade threatened economic sanctions, at least) of John Riles, Wesleyan circuit superintendent, before he embarked on the venture.¹⁷ By contrast Bourne, who had earlier responded to the Wesleyan failure to fund Harriseahead chapel by paying for it himself, sought no such support for his initiative. The first event was planned to counter the August Norton Wakes, but the Harriseahead congregation pre-empted it and Bourne ran the first camp-meeting on Mow Cop on 31st May 1807, despite the hostility of both Burslem and Macclesfield circuit authorities. He was too shy to preach at it: local preachers and others from further afield did the work assisted by class-leaders such as Bourne's cousin, Daniel Shufflebotham and exhorters including Clowes (not yet accepted as a lay preacher by the Wesleyans). This event was a sufficient success for it to be repeated over several days in early summer. He, his brother, and another sympathiser, Thomas Cotton, were ejected in 1808, and although the official reason was failure to fulfil class obligations, it was clearly a response to continuing insistence on camp-meetings. Bourne's ejection was mainly, though, a product of his single-minded stubbornness, because the circuit authorities tried hard to find a compromise here; he refused.¹⁸ The grounds of exclusion have been portrayed as underhand,¹⁹ yet return to the fold would have been much harder had the grounds been given as a breach of the Conference rulings.

¹⁶ Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, p. 187ff; Rawlyk, *Canada Fire*, pp. 147-161, 173, 181.

¹⁷ Clowes, *Journals*, p. 47.

¹⁸ Bourne, B Text, f. 56.

¹⁹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 84-5.

Bourne had been ejected by the old connexion, but he continued to operate on and often within its fringes. He applied for a preaching licence for John Riles, the outgoing Wesleyan superintendent, to officiate at a camp meeting in July that year,²⁰ and he attended worship to hear Riles' successor, Jonathan Edmondson, preach.²¹ He travelled to Yorkshire where he heard and admired the Wesleyan itinerant William ('Billy') Dawson, walking all the way; but he returned by coach, spending a week's wage for a labourer to do so.²² Both his behaviour and Wesleyan tolerance shows that he had been disciplined, not exiled, for his stubbornness.

That could alienate allies and opponents alike, as the example of Hannah Goodwin reveals. She was the 13 year old daughter of Matthew Goodwin, an early sympathiser who lived at the Cloud.²³ Bourne had high hopes that she would become an activist,²⁴ and was therefore disappointed to find that she had 'given way to the courting spirit', because by then, he had come to think that 'the marriage union in the flesh is very defiling'.²⁵ He wrote to caution her against the dangers of carnal desire on 20th November 1808. The advice was badly received. A number of lines in the manuscript are then heavily deleted, and surviving entries recommence on 7th December, when Bourne reported that he would fill in the gap with retrospective accounts. He had clearly been upset at the reception his advice incurred: for him, it was not that his actions were inappropriate, but that others were evil-intentioned towards him. He reported an overwhelming sense of awareness of Hannah's opposition, from a distance of twenty miles, on 27th November when she

²⁰ Bourne Journals, C2, f. 10. Note that the date places this *after* Bourne had been denied his class-ticket.

²¹ Ibid., C2, f. 35.

²² Ibid., 2nd August 1808, C2 f. 24. The 7/- cost exceeded what Bourne would later claim to be a labourer's wage: A Text, f. 293, B Text, p. 74.

²³ The Cloud is located east of Congleton: see Map 1.

²⁴ Bourne Journals, C2, f. 5.

²⁵ Ibid., C2, f. 56.

received my letter and rejected the testimony and rejected me, the Lord's messenger, and hereby rejected the Lord himself...At night I prayed...I believe the Lord returned a part of the power and Hannah was in part restored.

Bourne considered ditching her as an activist, but decided to persevere. The terms of that decision are revealing:

As I was coming home...the Lord, I believe, made me an offer of being a priest to Mrs Sergeant of Kingsley instead of Hannah Goodwin but I knew the Lord was able to make me a priest for both and I besought him on this...

He wrote to Hannah again the following day (Monday 28th November) despite further opposition from a local preacher, and was still engaging in acrimonious discussions as late as 26th December.²⁶

Throughout this period and beyond, he was accompanying Clowes to officiate at Wesleyan class-meetings, and Clowes in turn was attending his camp-meetings.²⁷ Clowes paid the inevitable price for this: one of Edmondson's last acts was to withhold his class-ticket. But whereas Bourne's Harriseahead miners stayed loyal to Wesleyanism when he was ejected, Clowes' classes decamped with him, and supporters and associates joined him in informal and itinerant ministry. Wesleyan impatience was clearly growing: the circuit issued an ultimatum to the small Stanley class to desist from inviting unrecognised preachers on unplanned Sundays, which led to their severance from connexion; yet the authorities continued to turn a blind eye to the situation in Tunstall itself. Since 1808, Mary Dunnell, a Bourne supporter funded by him, had been holding religious services in the kitchen of Joseph Smith, the man who had funded the Wesleyan chapel in the town, and whose affairs were managed by his cousin James Steele.²⁸ The venue was now also used by Clowes and his class. This was tolerated until April 1811 when Steele suffered the same fate as

²⁶ Bourne Journals, C2, ff. 56-63, and D f. 3.

²⁷ Ibid., passim; camp-meeting reference C2, f. 31.

²⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 107.

Clowes, and his classes decamped with him too.²⁹ Within two weeks Bourne, hitherto adamant that he would not seek to set up a separate connexion, agreed to co-fund with his brother a chapel to house the Tunstall faithful now too numerous to be accommodated in Smith's kitchen. Over the following year, many of the previously isolated groups coalesced, and took the name Primitive Methodists in February 1812.

Around this time Bourne underwent a personal crisis, the character of which can be inferred from his recording of the revelatory dreams of the faithful, who were usually women, and occasionally children – never adult males.³⁰ He claimed that the dreams exposed the standing of the movement's figures before God, with Crawford ranked first among the preachers or, on one occasion, second to Lorenzo Dow. Whereas Mary Dunnell ranked intermediately among the male preachers, a separate list of pious women emerged too, and it featured one of the seers: Hannah Mountford. She was the female servant at the Bourne family farm who accompanied James Bourne's wife on her preaching tours, and made a sudden appearance in these dreams in 1811. Hannah proceeded from fourth female in rank in April to first by June that year. Repeated references to her status over the following month appear to reflect his growing attachment, and he proposed to her during a class-meeting soon thereafter.³¹ He was rebuffed. Bourne's diary has (3rd February 1812) a curious entry, evidently made in 1813 to explain a gap: 'I left off keeping a diary for near a year, during which time James Crawfoot (sic) declined in faith and fell into sin.' Crawford, who had initially provided Bourne with the scriptural justification for his preferred celibacy, had married Hannah in the meantime.³² On resuming his diaries, Bourne observed (19th March 1813) that 'Crawford (sic)...is fallen worse and worse'. At

²⁹ Ibid., i, pp. 108/9; Bourne Journals, F ff. 121-2.

³⁰ Bourne Journals: (Hannah Mountford's dreams) E f. 254, F ff. 90, 130-1; (Nanny Foden's) E f. 277; (Mary Dunnell and Nanny Blood's) F ff. 58-9; (Hannah Weston's) F f. 148); (four children at same venue) F f. 95 (unspecified person or persons) F ff. 87, 120, 133, 137, 138.

³¹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 148; Ritson, p. 101.

³² Bourne Journals, C2, f. 51.

his instigation, Crawford was called to account on 15th April 1813 for failing to keep his appointments; it has been suggested that this was at least partly due to Hannah's ill-health, but he also wanted to minister where he chose, not where he was directed. Crawford did not appear, and vanishes from the record. In fact several congregations defected with him (much as had happened when Mary Dunnell was ousted) and some remained identified with his name two decades later.³³

Events in Bourne's life over the next few years are largely a matter of conjecture, because surviving records are scant. He would claim in retrospect to have grown increasingly unhappy from 1816 about the trend towards dignified preaching, believing that it damaged the movement, and to have been prostrated by the findings of a committee of enquiry that followed the December 1818 quarterly meeting. Whatever the truth, he suffered a nervous breakdown in January 1819, which forced him to give up his connexional roles. After recovery he was transformed, his self-doubts cast aside and his behaviour, already idiosyncratic, became even more so: his diary records that, when he arrived for the 1820 Hull Conference, no-one else was present except him and the Lord, so he opened the meeting with singing and prayer, passed some resolutions, then adjourned it in the same manner.³⁴ This was part of a broader pattern of behaviour: he began to 'soliloquise' – a euphemism both for talking to himself and role-playing all the parts in imagined conversations and arguments.³⁵

By 1824, Bourne had begun to worry about the pace of expansion: the lack of effective administrative machinery left the movement dangerously exposed, with too many poor preachers (and poorer administrators) on the pay-bill, and financial commitments to too

³³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 147.

³⁴ Bourne Journals, Tuesday 2nd May 1820, L f. 59.

³⁵ Walford, *Life*, ii, p. 100.

many marginal causes.³⁶ Yet the 1825 numbers showed continuing growth; apparently the pessimistic Bourne struggled to persuade others of the seriousness of looming problems. He was right though, and the 1826 and 1827 numbers were so bad that they were suppressed. Revised funding rules and the belated policing of the 1819 conduct rules (literacy, scriptural knowledge, sober dress, and monthly reporting) had turned round the position by 1828.³⁷ By the 1830s, itinerants who failed to deliver growth were warned and those who made a habit of it were removed from the lists. Irrespective of numerical achievements, all were expected to undertake a Herculean scale of home visiting. The days of the 'bacon preachers' – the minority who exploited the role – were brief.

It completed Bourne's grip on the Connexion, which he had built since 1821 and would exercise until around 1837, but he held power only in the sense that no other central figure had any. The movement remained stubbornly polycentric, and resistant to control by Bemersley, or anywhere else. A new generation of men began to emerge, however, who were unhappy with that, and between 1837 and 1842 gradually eased Bourne's hands off the tiller. There followed ten years of polite marginalisation by the connexion and increasingly bitter bile from Bourne. He died, admired but not liked by those who knew him, revered by those who did not.

The Connexion erected no memorial to him – that task fell to his three nieces – and while it purchased his papers from his literary executor and nephew, John Walford, they remained unpublished. Indeed the bulk of the diaries were destroyed, removing what was 'torn, dirty and...worthless'.³⁸ It was a sad coda to his life. According to Wilkinson, Bourne's

³⁶ Petty, *History*, 1860, pp. 204-6; Leonard Brown, 'Hugh Bourne, a Bicentenary Reflection' in PWHS XXXVIII, part 5, 1972, p. 121ff.

³⁷ The 1819 preparatory meeting had determined that all itinerants keep a journal containing all significant developments and travels, contents reported monthly to the circuit: Walford, *Life*, ii, p. 68.

³⁸ Wilkinson, *Bourne*, p. 182.

centenary biographer, a fire at the Bemersley farmhouse in 1834 was to blame for the loss of some material and the condition of the rest.³⁹ Yet some of the destroyed material had been sufficiently legible for his first posthumous biographer to quote extensively from it (see 'Treatment' below) in the mid-1850s; and the condition of what survives calls the damage claims into doubt – see Appendix. It must be concluded that it was the contents, not the condition, that dictated the destruction; but if what remains of the diaries is selective and potentially unreliable, it suffices to show the autobiographies are a dangerously flawed alternative. The following six aspects underline the problem, while exposing some of Bourne's character traits.

First, he offered three descriptions of his birthplace in his autobiographies the first of which is the most complete:⁴⁰

Our neighbourhood consisted of three rather small farmhouses, and there was neither other house nor school nor place of worship near; and there was neither public horse-road nor foot-road near our house so it was solitary...my father put me to school first at Werrington about two miles distant; and afterwards at Bucknall, about two miles distant in another direction...

It is an account accepted literally by others. For example, Kendall quoted an 1872 account written to mark the centenary of his birth, which included further claims from elsewhere in Bourne's writings, including that 'the family saw no one beyond their own circle, and of the great outside world they knew but very little'.⁴¹ Quite how this is to be reconciled with Bourne's daily journeys to school or his later apprenticeship to a peripatetic uncle – or Joseph's patronage of local inns – is not explained.

³⁹ Wilkinson, *Bourne*, p. 146, fn 20.

⁴⁰ Bourne, A text, f. 4; B text, p. 1; C text, p. 2.

⁴¹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 7.

Ritson, in 1909, went further. 'The man who was to shape a great religious movement was himself moulded amid the silence and seclusion of the uplands';⁴² more recently Deborah Valenze contended that by this date 'the county had not undergone the... transformation that characterized it as a major iron and pottery center'.⁴³ An anonymous observer stated in an article on this now-listed building that 'even in 2008 the remoteness of this farmhouse is still apparent'.⁴⁴ The common assumption here is that the farm must be less isolated in the modern age than it was when built. In fact the reverse applies, as five images confirm. They are Yates' cartologically inaccurate map of 1775, the inaugural OS map of the area, which dates from about 100 years later, two resolutions of the current OS map, and a satellite photograph dating from 2008.

The 1775 map shows the farm standing at a modest distance from three others clustered around a minor road linking two turnpikes. Yet a low-resolution OS map indicates that the turnpike ran closer to the farm, while the farm was closer to the lane, today called Ford Hayes Lane. The first-edition OS map confirms that the farm was connected to it by a y-shaped track, and comparison of that with the contoured higher-resolution current OS map explains both its shape and why the Yates map is wrong. The early cartographer responded to the slope of the ground as well as the horizontal displacement; and the access road and the lane itself follow a path that circumvented the stream and moderated the sloping ground. So Bourne's claim of isolation is somewhat selective, and perhaps reflects the perception formed by him as a very small child. The reason that modern observers have not spotted this is to be seen in the satellite image: the OS cartographers have continued to show a non-existent half-mile section of the lane running from Widow Fields Farm to Bentilee. The lower leg of the y-shaped farm track is truncated, and the only

⁴² Ritson, *Romance*, p. 12.

⁴³ Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Internet reference <http://www.thepotteries.org/listed/4a.html>.

access from Bentilee to Ford Hayes Farm is via the north-eastern section of the interrupted lane entailing a journey of around seven miles. The isolated line of trees starting from the farm track, top right, and meandering to the bottom left, sits above the lane's former path. From the point at which the southern section of the lane terminates, there is no visible evidence that the farmhouse sits only a few hundred yards away above a low wooded escarpment; from above, there is no hint of the proximity of the built-up area below.

The farm's easterly panorama is of rising ground to the moorlands, but the westerly outlook is of the array of the first four pottery towns dominating the opposite flank of the Bentilee valley, two to three miles distant. Longton was the last of these to start up pottery manufacture on an industrial scale (1756) and by 1780, the pall of smoke from all four would have been visible for miles. Some of their fuel came from the numerous shallow mines that dotted the Bentilee valley at the time, no doubt transported by horse-drawn coal-wagons along the turnpike. But those were quickly exhausted to be replaced with deeper mines further afield: by 1834, it is said that Bucknall parish was 'dependent chiefly upon agriculture'.⁴⁵ So, the valley standing only about half a mile from the house was a busier place in 1780 than in 1880; and the farm itself is more isolated today than in 1880: not only has road access disappeared, but the land to the south and east is a rugged country park; it is though man-made, having been created by 19th-century coal-mining and 20th-century quarrying. Bourne's isolation was not physical; it was spiritual.

Second, that sense of isolation was probably heightened by relations with his extrovert father. He saw his mother as a saint and his father as a drunkard, inimical to true religion. Subsequent authorities have accepted this, even though it seems rather too black-and-

⁴⁵ William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of Staffordshire...*, Sheffield, 1834, p. 532.

white. Petty, for example, records that the father was 'a man of violent temper and somewhat dissolute habits'.⁴⁶ Kendall went further:

Joseph Bourne, farmer, wheelwright, and timber-dealer was no good liver, though his days were long in the land. He was passionate, a drunkard and dissolute, a derider of Methodism and dissent, and yet withal a stiff Churchman. Sometimes in his convivial moments he would boast that "he had a bishop and two parsons at home" (alluding to his wife and sons) ; but if so, the parsons had to do their priest's office in the attic or anywhere they could out of sight and hearing of the violent and churlish man.⁴⁷

Yet the 'drunkard and dissolute' made his fortune selling pottery; moved to and probably built Ford Hayes farmhouse, which dates from the second half of the eighteenth century; made a sufficient success to move to a larger farm at Bemersley; and continued to farm and trade until late in life, living to be almost 100. There is a brief hint in Kendall that perhaps Joseph's hostility went little further than unsubtle mockery. Bourne's account, quoted by him, of reading the life of Fletcher of Madeley, the Arminian Magazine, and selected sermons of John Wesley on Sunday mornings at home hardly chimes with the image of violent paternal hostility.⁴⁸ This is reinforced by recalling the extent of the household's evangelistic activities: besides Hugh and James, the latter's wife missioned the surrounding area, and a third son, William, would become an itinerant preacher in North America after emigrating.⁴⁹

Third, Bourne's claim of humble economic origins proves dubious. He was penny-pinching, which eased his adoption of the mantle of poverty, but it also has allowed modern writers to mistake choice for necessity.⁵⁰ Bourne may have thought himself a spiritually poor sinner, but he was a prosperous man. It was later estimated that the first

⁴⁶ Wilkinson, *Bourne*, pp. 13-26; and Petty, *History*, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 8. A footnote confirms his age at death as 'nearly a hundred years of age'.

⁴⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 10-12; it contains a quotation from the A Text.

⁴⁹ Bourne papers, MARC, DDHB 2/4/4.

⁵⁰ In addition to previously cited examples, Aquila Barber, 'Primitive Methodism' in A. W. Harrison, et al., *The Methodist Church*, London, 1932, p. 83.

two camp-meetings cost him £100, several years' pay for a labourer;⁵¹ and an 1810 diary entry shows that when he and his brother reckoned up their mutual debts, James owed Hugh £66-13-5½d (£66.67).⁵² Some years earlier, he had funded the purchase of materials for Harriseahead chapel (the first of three funded by him); the cost of the timber alone was over £30, and this brick-and-tile chapel must have cost considerably more.⁵³ Only in later life, when the family fortunes turned sour, did he become hard-pressed. Even that is a comparative matter: in 1847, fretting about his pensions, he could still lend two people, identified only by initials, but probably his nephew James Bourne Junior and the bankrupt father, the sum of £35 at an annual rate of 4.5% interest.⁵⁴ Bourne forswore commerce for his faith and adopted a frugal lifestyle; his brother's imprudence, not his religious choices, decided his later economic circumstances; they did not reflect his socio-economic origins.

Fourth, Bourne's stubbornness interacted with his religious convictions. As God's messenger, those who disagreed with him were not just wrong; they were sinning.⁵⁵ So Wesleyans defied God by unchurching him in 1808, because although he had failed to meet his obligations, he was doing more important things elsewhere. But when James Crawford tried to argue that he, not the infant connexion, judged where he should go, it was God, not Bourne, who removed him.⁵⁶ Similarly, Hannah Mountford and Hannah Goodwin were wrong because they did not bend to his (God's) will; and they promptly disappeared from his diaries. Perhaps the most sustained effect though was that it made him incapable of responding to disagreement with lobbying and persuasion, as evidenced in the case of the Harriseahead chapel, or Hannah Goodwin. He could justify his

⁵¹ Ritson, *Romance*, p 67; the figure is not evidenced, but is in the right order of magnitude: Bourne B Text, pp. 53/54, gives a figure of £30 for the 1807 meetings, and £20 for the first 1808 camp-meeting alone.

⁵² Bourne Journals, 3rd Feb 1810, E, f. 222.

⁵³ Bourne B Text, f. 13; Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 122. Old photograph: *Ibid.*, i, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Bourne Journals, Thursday 17th June 1847, S f. 140. The initials read J & JB.

⁵⁵ Bourne Journals, 21st November 1808.

⁵⁶ Bourne Journals, 15th April 1813.

intransigence on the basis that compromise was a satanic snare: it would explain why he welcomed the prospect of Riles preaching at a camp-meeting, while remaining unbending about the label.⁵⁷ It would also be all of a piece with his choice of Methodism in the first place: as the movement that garnered the greater hostility, it was more likely to be God's true church.⁵⁸ Bourne's heroic discourse allowed Edward Thompson to claim that the 'local Wesleyan Establishment was little interested in the converts' being won and accordingly disowned the work.⁵⁹ In reality, the Old Connexion was very interested in them; but it, like the Prims confronted by the maverick behaviour of Crawford, was even more committed to connexional discipline.

Fifth, he was ready to change or ignore inconvenient facts showing others' contributions. His cousin, Daniel Shufflebotham, who refused to support him once the Wesleyans came out against camp-meetings, was pilloried in retrospect, yet on the occasion of Bourne's last meeting with him in 1813, he wrote 'I had a good time with him. There is something wonderful in him.'⁶⁰ Then James Nixon was retrospectively castigated as a 'talker' against open-air worship; yet he recorded in his diary of August 1811 that this ally of William Clowes was a 'wonderful preacher'.⁶¹ Similarly, the man he valued highly enough both to take to London on a trip in 1810, and whom he consulted routinely when troubled by self-doubt around the same time, James Crawford, was written off as a drinker who 'was not fitted to be a travelling preacher'.⁶² The main target for this invective was William Clowes, and Chapter 5 aims to pinpoint the deterioration in their relationship. One item will suffice here: in the autobiography, he claimed that after 1808 Clowes, a 'reformed

⁵⁷ Bourne B Text, f. 56

⁵⁸ Bourne Self Review, f. 21.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 397.

⁶⁰ Bourne C Text, p. 123; Bourne Journals, F ff. 3-4.

⁶¹ Bourne C Text, Appendix to Chapter 23, p 122; Bourne Journals, Thursday 10th March 1814, F f. 150.

⁶² Bourne Journals 25th September – 8th October 1810 record the trip; numerous diary entries around then confirm that Bourne joined Crawford's evangelistic efforts and sought his counsel regularly. Autobiographical quotation: Bourne A text f. 293.

profligate', led the Kidsgrove class to 'a ruin so complete that there was not one single member left'.⁶³ Yet his diary for Monday 28th August 1809 records that the Kidsgrove class was 'the highest I know'; and that he accompanied Clowes when he preached there on Monday 12th July 1813 when 'it was a glorious time. One was converted'.⁶⁴ The subsequent venom may reflect the fact that the class refused to join any connexion featuring Hugh and James Bourne.⁶⁵

Perhaps his most remarkable claim, however, was the implication that the Deed Poll mentioned only himself and his brother James, neatly concealing the fact that this reference to the CMM societies was a preface to the substantive statement in the trust deed that

...the said several societies and classes, *together with other congregations, societies, and classes, in several parts of England*, were afterwards closely united and connected, and the whole thereof under the care of the said Hugh Bourne, James Bourne, William Clowes, and James Steele, were formed into one general community or Connexion, known and distinguished by the title or denomination of 'The Primitive Methodist Connexion.'⁶⁶ (this writer's italics)

Finally Bourne's religious inclinations often alienated him from his own social milieu, yet his poor social skills prevented him from blending with those of like mind. His liking for noisy emotional worship was distrusted by Burslem's lay preachers and officials;⁶⁷ but when he was unchurched by the Wesleyans, the Harriseahead miners, and his cousin, did not decamp in sympathy.

By the 1840s, it seems, the facts were what Bourne wanted them to be; yet few historians have concerned themselves with the historiographical significance of his changing account, with doleful consequences for the modern understanding of what actually occurred. One

⁶³ Bourne, A Text, f. 151.

⁶⁴ Bourne Journals, E f. 119, F f. 328.

⁶⁵ Bourne, C Text, p. 174; also Walford, i, p. 329; source not given, perhaps C Text.

⁶⁶ Bourne, A Text, f. 314; Walford, i, p. 274; Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 1. Kendall cannot have been unaware of this attempted deception by both men, but did not comment upon it.

⁶⁷ Bourne Journals 1 ff. 2, 4; and A f. 30: 17th, 21st, 23rd February and 21st March 1803.

exception is a current researcher, Timothy Woolley, whose views are considered in the context of the deterioration in the Bourne-Clowes relationship in Chapter 5. Yet with the exception of the geographic reality of Ford Hayes, which became apparent only after personal visit, none of the foregoing is concealed from view by those who have read the material: the abiding questions remain why so many did not, and why those who did nonetheless chose to interpret the facts otherwise.

TREATMENTS OF BOURNE'S LIFE BY WALFORD

John Walford, the husband of one of Bourne's nieces, was appointed as Hugh's literary executor. He was the first of many who used the autobiographies to bolster Bourne's claims to primacy; but he is one of the few who did so having read the unexpurgated diaries. What follows is not an exhaustive schedule, but merely a few examples of how Bourne's first biographer polished the account – even if he shrank from the claim that 'the Lord made me [i.e., Bourne] father on earth of the great work of religion'.⁶⁸ He had been building the claim for decades, notably by dating the idea of camp-meetings to 1801 and 'the camp meeting without a name';⁶⁹ while by claiming the lion's share of the founding membership (see Chapter 4) he marginalised other strands that came together in 1811.

Walford did not contradict these and similar claims. He dated the conversion of Steele, Clowes, and the latter's closest allies, Woodnorth and Nixon, to a love-feast held at Harriseahead in Christmas week 1804, thus locating them as a product of Bourne's, rather than the Stockport activists', revivalism.⁷⁰ This was despite the prior claim by Clowes, that his conversion took place at a prayer-meeting on 20th January 1805 following a

⁶⁸ Bourne B Text, f. 13.

⁶⁹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 34: the term retrospectively (and unrealistically) applied to Bourne's first sermon which was held outdoors.

⁷⁰ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 112.

Wesleyan love-feast at Burslem to which he had managed to secure entry despite not being a class-member.⁷¹ Similarly, there are key differences of account about how Crawford was encountered: Walford claimed, based on the autobiographies, that Bourne met him via a farmer named Joseph Lowe and thus was the means by which Clowes was introduced, whereas Clowes claimed that he was the person who first made contact, and later told Bourne, offering to take him along on a future occasion.⁷²

Walford also tended to be selective in his quotations: for example the diary extract for 27th November 1808 cited previously concerning his estrangement from Hannah Goodwin omits the word 'me' thus reducing the egotistical nature of the statement.⁷³ Next, he provided a milder account of the ejection of Crawford in which he abandoned the Prims. For example, his quotation of the diary for 15th March 1813 excludes this sentence: 'His conduct has been horrid and shocking.'⁷⁴ While Hannah Goodwin and Crawford then disappear from Walford's account, a curious item in the Methodist archives suggests that Hannah's relations with the rest of the Bourne family remained good. A letter dated May 1818 from James Bourne to Hannah's emigrant son contained friendly references to other members of the Mountford family, including the assurance that his mother was well, and a hint that the Mountfords were perhaps not as humble as the mother's servant status might imply.⁷⁵

There were occasions where Walford's selectivity amounted to falsification. For example his account of Bourne's 'premonition' of expulsion reads thus:

⁷¹ Clowes, *Journals*, pp. 18-19.

⁷² Clowes, *Journals*, pp. 65-6; Walford, *Life*, i, p. 153. Walford's source for his statement is Bourne B Text, f. 41.

⁷³ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 205.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 378, 379.

⁷⁵ Hugh Bourne Papers, MARC ref DDBH2/4/4. The Bournes and Mountfords were related: Bourne Journal Sunday 14th December 1809.

We quote again the diary. 'On Thursday June 23rd [1808], I set off for home, and on the way...it suddenly came to my mind that I should soon be put out of the old Methodist society'.⁷⁶

Yet the underlined words appeared in an entry dated 28th June, the day *following* Bourne's removal, in which Bourne claims to recall the premonition. Walford's re-ordering neatly sidesteps the retrospection.

Walford recognised Bourne's oddities, and tried to rehabilitate both Crawford and Shufflebotham, but only as Bourne acolytes, whereas Bourne was the eager pupil of both in turn. Shufflebotham was raised up as the man who first proposed the camp-meeting, 'a meeting upon Mow some Sunday' when the miners would 'have a whole day's praying', some six years before the actual event, and later writers concurred.⁷⁷ Perhaps it was said in 1801, but when the circumstances leading to the inaugural event occurring on Mow Cop rather than Norton are recalled, it seems that Bourne has, in hindsight, made a virtue of necessity thereby antedating the genesis of the venture. As noted earlier, the camp-meeting had a wider attraction for him than that claimed by Walford.⁷⁸ This reflects a continuing theme in subsequent writings on Bourne: overstating his authority, to be further discussed in Chapter 5.

SUMMARY

Bourne embodied Bebbington's four evangelical traits, in particular his workaholic activism.⁷⁹ At the age of 70 and officially retired, he preached on 151 days, and attended at least 27 camp-meetings, love-feasts and circuit or District meetings in a 304-day period commencing 9th November 1842. On Monday 26th November he walked 21 miles along an

⁷⁶ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 189.

⁷⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 33.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 61. Clowes, *Journals*, p. 48 ff.

⁷⁹ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 3.

undulating route across the Cheshire plain, the last few miles of which entailed a climb of over 400 feet to his home.⁸⁰ That would have been a substantial challenge for a fit young man; for a septuagenarian with bad feet – and carrying luggage – it was exceptional. Yet it will be recalled that he had journeyed by coach from Leeds in 1808, and to and from London in 1810; he was an early adopter of rail travel;⁸¹ and indeed had arrived in Manchester by train before this 1842 marathon. He could have travelled most of the journey home by the same means, via Crewe. Although perhaps unintentional, this was image-creation. Bourne actively portrayed himself as a poor servant of Jesus, and subsequent writers have responded accordingly. Wilkinson may be the most recent Methodist to endorse it,⁸² but the image persists more widely in the academic community.

So Bourne was a complex man: introverted, yet he craved noisy extrovert worship; vain, yet he was anxious to be seen as humble; clever, yet he lacked emotional intelligence. His vanity was such that he was easily won over by praise, and equally ready to lash out at critics. Walford noted how he would hang on to grudges, remember slights, and repeatedly refer to occasions in the past when he had been proved right in the face of opposition.⁸³ Petty's discreetly-worded description leaves little doubt that he was not above settling scores:

These stringent rules were carried out [by Bourne] without mitigation, and generally, at least, without partiality. Human infirmity was sometimes apparent in his enforcement of rigorous measures, and good men occasionally complained, and not without reason, of severe treatment.⁸⁴

He was convinced, even before the first camp-meeting, of his special status, and wrote as much in 1808 (the Goodwin incident). Yet until 1819, this troubled him, causing him to

⁸⁰ Bourne Journals, 1842-43 passim; cited day, Journal M, f. 3.

⁸¹ Coach journeys previously cited; the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*, 1831, p. 409 quotes from a now-vanished diary entry that he travelled from Manchester to Liverpool by rail on Monday 1st August 1831; two days later he went by steamer from there to Whitehaven.

⁸² Walford, *Life*; William Antliff, *The Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne*, London, 1872; Jesse Ashworth, *The Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne, Founder of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, London, 1888.

⁸³ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 338 (hastiness); ii, p. 354 (openness to flattery); and ii, p. 368 (recall of grudges).

⁸⁴ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 252.

reflect and on occasion to temporarily desist from diary-keeping. After 1819, his transformation was therefore not immediately visible to most (other than William Clowes – see chapter 5) who had known him, because it was not a strengthening of his conviction, or a greater preparedness to show it; now, he no longer fretted over others' failure to see him as God's emissary. He published a 'history' of the connexion claiming Mow Cop as the founding event, and bearing only his image on the frontispiece; by 1829, the movement's class-tickets bore the dates of 1807 and 1810 marking respectively the inaugural camp-meeting and the adoption of the small (and short-lived) class at Stanley.⁸⁵

Bourne was a man of great ability, but also of considerable shortcomings: by concentrating only on the former, historians have missed the opportunity to see how the latter shaped what he wrote. In particular the discourse of heroic adversity that he instigated has been allowed to survive and transform itself over the intervening two centuries, with significant implications for our understanding of the origins of the connexion; that discourse is the subject of the next chapter.

⁸⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 112.

This chapter traces first how Bourne by exploiting his editorial role fed the connexional taste for heroic legends, then moves on to consider how five later PM writers embraced them. Finally, it examines how social historians of the last half-century have re-moulded the resulting gospel discourse into a class-and-gender one.

EDITORIAL APPROACH

Bourne claimed that the camp-meeting was central to the origins of the Prims and in 1824, that his version owed nothing to American influences.¹ Analysis of the 1822 editions of the monthly magazines shows one way that he bolstered those claims.² Every edition argued the scriptural justification for open-air preaching, based on biblical texts and past practices. Yet camp-meetings were relatively infrequent alternatives to other forms of worship.³ They were high-profile forms of early awareness-building, but this was just one element of one stage of the recruitment-retention process; getting settled venues and installing the necessary pastoral capacity were more substantial tasks. By now, the movement was opening about ten chapels a year in four eastern hot-spot counties alone.⁴ The rhetoric said one thing; the actions, another.

Most issues also included a reverent account of the deaths, usually young, of devout followers, usually female (13 of 18), who passed on fortified by belief in their salvation.⁵ If the first such obituary is typical, Bourne probably wrote or rewrote most of them: it was

¹ Hugh Bourne, (ed), *A collection of Hymns...for the use of the Primitive Methodists*, Bemersley, 1832. The preface contains the claim in a short passage dated 6th September 1824. See also Wilkinson, *Bourne*, p. 124 which claims a date of 1821 for an unspecified earlier source for the same claim.

² This writer's analysis of the articles in the bound edition of *PMM*, 1822, Bemersley.

³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 508: The May-July 1819 plan lists about 1000 preaching events, another 100 or so prayer meetings, but only seven camp-meetings.

⁴ In Norfolk, Lincolnshire, the East Riding and Derbyshire, the movement opened at least 29 chapels between 1821 and 1823: source, 1851 Census transcriptions, substantively cited in Chapter 7.

⁵ There were no fewer than eight in the 'false start' *PMM* of 1819 too.

ascribed to William Clowes but was considerably more literate than his 1830s notebooks.⁶ 'Glorious deaths' were a common Methodist motif at the time;⁷ the examples in the magazines were selected for their didactic merit, not their representativeness, but this has not stopped others using them as a route to gauging the movement's followers.⁸ There was also a report from one or more circuits, and seven issues referred to Samuel Waller's jailing in Manchester in 1821. It was accompanied in October's issue with a journal extract of James Bonsor, who had suffered overnight detention in Shropshire. Yet the resulting image of a generally oppressive civil regime, and Prim activists as oppressed latter-day disciples, ready to sacrifice their freedom for their faith, may be overdone: extensive searches in both connexional writings and press reports failed to uncover any further instances of action against any of the other 201 PM itinerants or 1435 local preachers during the whole of 1822.⁹

Subsequent scholars using the Magazines as a data source thus detect a sudden shift in reporting style and content around 1840, and less clearly at later dates, which they have read as a sea-change within the movement; the change was very marked, notably in a declining emphasis on the recruitment aspects of camp-meetings.¹⁰ Yet the sudden reduction was little to do with their changing character: Russell stated that they had become an annual congregational celebration by no later than 1834.¹¹ It reflected Bourne's departure from the editor's seat, and John Flesher's removal of book-room operations to

⁶ The William Clowes Papers, DDCL1/1-1/7, MARC.

⁷ A Gregory Schneider, 'The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists', *Church History*, Vol. 56, No. 3. (Sep. 1987), pp. 348-363.

⁸ Werner, *History*, pp. 155-6; obituaries form the entire dataset for Wayne Johnson's 1989 thesis, previously cited.

⁹ Petty, *History*, 1860: jailings, p. 137; preacher numbers, p. 159. Few other instances emerge from other sources, as discussed later.

¹⁰ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 252ff.

¹¹ Russell, *Writings*, p. 95. It means that even by 1840, the majority of followers had never experienced any other kind of camp-meeting.

London in order to break free of interference in editorial matters. The disreputable had become the demure, but not between the covers of the magazine.

On occasion, Bourne's editorial choices reflected his intentions more overtly. For instance the death of James Steele was announced in the July 1827 Magazine, the first printed after he died in May that year, but there was no obituary or celebration of any kind in later magazines in that year, or in 1828. The July 1827 entry reads:

Died 8th May 1827, in the sixty-third year of his age, our respected brother James Steele of Tunstall...He...had acted as local preacher, leader of two classes, and was superintendent of the Sunday School. He was also the circuit steward and his name is well known in our Connexion...Wm. Clowes and H. Bourne were with him on...the day of his departure.¹²

Most of these were Wesleyan roles: the 'circuit steward' was the Connexion's first leader, holding the most senior roles as Chairman of the Book-Room Committee and the General Committee from 1821 onwards. Bourne's editorship would eventually be terminated (see Chapter 5) but for two decades he had free rein, and the demand for heroic stories was undeniable, even if the reality was of the Prims' growing acceptance. Chapter 1 noted the popularity of works such as Nelson's *Journal* and Church's *Gospel Victories*: Bourne's genius was to chime so perfectly with his readership's tastes.

VICTORIAN WRITERS

Church had picked up Bourne's baton, celebrating the heroic past that he believed the Connexion might otherwise forget. It made no attempt to be balanced or historically accurate; and the date of coverage, 1812-1842, coincided with the Bourne-Clowes era, and was thus implicitly critical of their successors. Yet at least one historian cited a

¹² *PMM*, 1827, p. 249.

particularly lurid passage as evidence of hardships, despite describing it as a 'generalised account, which conflated several elements of the type of persecution the Primitives might meet'.¹³ That persecution entailed: 'rough music'; horns and drums leading tumult and uproar; blood from the slaughterhouse; eggs charged with vitriol and other injurious ingredients; ropes and chains to drag the speaker into a watercourse; cattle excrement; and finally, when taking leave, a hail of stones and flints. There is no case recorded by other writers of vitriol attacks, and no cited evidence for it by Church; and while the other events did occur, two of them (animal blood and roping into a watercourse) are noted only once by Petty, in the same incident. The discharge of slaughterhouse blood was threatened but did not occur, and the roping attempt failed.¹⁴ If one comes at the hostility data from the experience of named individuals, there is no recorded case of Bourne being stoned and only one recorded case of it happening to William Clowes. Church's description of such attacks on the early Prims as routine and normally culminating in stoning by 'the greater part of the mob' is hyperbole, and conceals the fact that such action was ritualistic in character, more often intended to humiliate than to injure. As Russell's account discussed below shows, horrific events happened, but only occasionally, and actual injury was rare. It is a measure firstly of the strength of the discourse as early as 1851 that Church could write the work (which was popular, no matter what the connexional leaders thought) and secondly of its enduring character in that subsequent scholars have failed to question it sufficiently, because Ambler was not alone.¹⁵ Yet in one respect, Church's work is typical of better PM works in that even his identifiable episodes are often unrepresentative.¹⁶ The issue is not the data, but the uncritical weight placed on them by the failure to contextualise. Church's contemporaries were less accommodating, notably John Petty.

¹³ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p. 50.

¹⁴ At Stockbridge in 1833: Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 270.

¹⁵ His works are cited in Delia Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', *passim*.

¹⁶ For a sample see Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 269, 271-2 and 420-21; and ii, p. 347.

Petty entered the ministry very young, but his talents and solid Nonconformist education ensured a rapid rise through Prim ranks. He wrote a more scholarly account of the founding era than Church's version at the behest of Conference to mark the Jubilee. He was custodian of the Bourne manuscripts and had known Bourne, his brother James, and Clowes well; he was in a good position to know the merits and failings of each of them. Petty's *History*, published in 1860, was compiled both from his extensive experience dating from the late 1820s and from personal anecdotes and written memoirs submitted by the faithful in response to a connexion-wide request for data. The result is a well-researched, well-evidenced, measured account (sometimes covering the notorious rather than the typical), and when the Connexion decided to revise it twenty years later, the original text was unchanged, with merely some updating of events and statistics for the years after 1859.¹⁷ The revision failed to correct one small but significant error: by overlooking the pre-conference handbills that attempted to forestall the second Mow Cop meeting, he implied that Burslem and other circuits responded to the camp-meeting threat after the conference ruling.¹⁸ Excepting that, and his obedience to the heroic discourse, the work appears to be highly reliable as a source: all of the usual tales of jailings, stonings, and generalised hostility appear; the surprise is that they number just over 50.

Some of his examples are of minor and non-violent attempts to disrupt worship, and so it may be prudent to assume that few cases of serious assault were overlooked, while those of an unspecified nature were either threats not carried out or were minor in nature. The timing and geographic pattern broadly mirror that of judicial activity: cases in the North and Midlands were nearly all before 1824; there was a cluster of episodes in South

¹⁷ The work was reissued in 1880 as a new edition with the same author credited. The editor, and author of the supplementary chapters, was James Macpherson.

¹⁸ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 23.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Discourse

Shropshire from the mid-1820s; but the main and longest-lasting locus of opposition was in Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley area over a period of a decade and a half. 23 attacks featured no actual physical violence; 22 included stone-throwing, sometimes to scare rather than injure; 17 featured bell-ringing, blowing of horns, drum-beating, or loud profane singing to disrupt worship; egg-throwing occurred 16 times; dousing with filth, dirty water, or animal excrement, five times. In a total of seven instances, specific threats of violence were made but not carried out; magistrates or police intervened on at least four occasions to limit the scale of violence, and twice to prosecute offenders. The Thames Valley concentration might be seen as the squirearchy at work, but Petty suggests a more broadly-based explanation: this was an area where proletarian violence was ingrained and tolerated, even encouraged, as a sort of social safety-valve. Here, the annual inter-village football contests so disapproved of by the Prims were replaced by 'backswording', a free-for-all fight to the last man standing. By comparison the assaults on preachers were mild – no doubt because the victims unsportingly refused to fight back.¹⁹ Local press took a hostile line to the Russell case, much against the popular reaction that saw his early release.²⁰

Judicial hostility is held to have been both frequent and targeted disproportionately at the Prims: in 1911 it was claimed that there were 'a score of cases of serious imprisonment, and a countless number of arrests and temporary detention.'²¹ Yet the total of periods of detention of all identifiable cases of PM preachers come to between 42 and 57 weeks, allowing for differences of account, among 24 preachers detained overnight or longer,²² about half the sentence passed on and served by a single PM lay preacher for incitement as

¹⁹ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 179.

²⁰ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 12th June 1830; Kendall, *Origin*, ii, 332-3.

²¹ www.1911encyclopedia.org/The_Primitive_Methodist_Church, consulted 14th January 2010.

²² Four preachers were arrested more than once; two appear to have courted the risk.

a Chartist.²³ By the standards of the age, these were pin-pricks. Not only was the scale of arrests low; the hesitancy of benches to act is remarkable. Most detentions occurred when preachers refused to stand bail; and magistrates were unwilling even to fine them, anticipating principled refusal. Other than those instances of pre-trial confinements where bail was either not granted or declined, only six cases of imprisonment have been confidently traced, and only one of those was substantive: the rest were for refusal to give assurances or pay a fine. They are as follows:

- Samuel Waller, Ashton-under-Lyne, 17th June 1821: 90 days for obstruction, served in full. There were significant local protests, as the mill-owner was well-connected.
- Francis Jersey, Dalton-in-Furness, 11th May 1823: sentenced to 120 days for refusal to pay a fine, refusal overruled by Hull Circuit, released after 18 days.
- William Doughty, Oswestry, 3rd June 1823: 30 days; according to Petty, not served.
- Thomas Russell, Abingdon, 6th May 1830: 90 days of which 30 served, then released after widespread protest from as far afield as London (see below).
- George Stansfield, Dover, 7th March 1843: fined but refused to pay on principle; remanded in his own recognisances for seven days; maintaining his refusal, confined for seven days.
- Isaac Hedges, Bicester, 16th July 1843: after being twice remanded on bail, he was fined for obstruction and refused to pay; jailed for 21 days.²⁴

The 'countless number' of remands pending trial noted by the Encyclopaedia is equally hard to reconcile. Petty uncovered 21 in addition to the substantive cases above, plus one further case excluded for lack of specificity and corroboration. He recorded that a number

²³ Capper, described as 'respectable' was jailed in October 1842 to two years' imprisonment for incitement (*Standard*, Monday 17th October, 1842).

²⁴ Petty, *History*, 1860 (respectively pp. 117, 156, 163, 223, 337 and 357), and Kendall, *Origin*, (respectively, ii, pp. 18, 137, 286, 332, 348 and 349). There are minor differences between the two writers.

of worshippers attending open-air worship at Andover in 1836 were imprisoned for an unspecified period for trespass on private property.²⁵ Yet no record of it appears in the Hampshire Assize list for March that year, nor did the story attract any press coverage.²⁶ Kendall did not repeat Petty's claim, but noted five other instances missed by him, four of which were remands pending trial. The fifth was sketchily recorded: the jailing for nine weeks of Joseph Eden in Canterbury around 1839/40 for refusal, at the insistence of John Stamp, circuit superintendent, to be bound over.²⁷ Stamp's misdemeanours dominated the Reading Conference of 1841, and Petty dealt with that and the fallout it created, without referring to Eden.²⁸ He cannot have been unaware of such an outcome, and it seems hardly credible that both he and the contemporary press ignored what would have been the second-longest preaching-related period of confinement of a Prim.

Thus there were a total, reliably recorded, of 29 cases involving 24 preachers, and most of them were dismissed. Kendall added a few to Petty's total, and press coverage identified only three (two of which did not involve detention) beyond their combined efforts. It is likely that some cases escaped the notice of all three sources; but it is more likely that the number missed was small, and the cases trivial. It is prudent to regard these as substantially all of the instances of judicial action against the movement. Two of the three press-only cases are noteworthy.²⁹ The first concerned John Wyatt, 'a young man of decent exterior and deportment, with a strong dash of enthusiasm in his countenance', who had earlier appeared before Rochdale magistrates charged with criminal damage, at the joint urging of an Anglican clergyman and the publican whose premises had suffered the

²⁵ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 272.

²⁶ Petty sourced the claim from a quarterly return by the local itinerant for March 1836. The Assizes for the March quarter were reported at length in the edition of the *Hampshire Telegraph* Monday 7th March; further searches for references to Andover, to Primitive Methodists or to Ranters all fail to identify the claimed occurrence in the preceding six-month period.

²⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 456.

²⁸ Petty, *History*, 1860, pp. 335-6.

²⁹ For the third, see *Ipswich Journal*, 17th July 1830 and *Bury and Norwich Post*, 21st July 1830.

damage. Both claimed that it arose from Wyatt's temperance sermon, which had outraged the intoxicated audience of a mountebank performance taking place at the same time. The bench dismissed the case as groundless and issued a summons of assault against the vicar, who responded via an intermediary, admitting the offence, accepting Wyatt's right to preach, apologising to the victim, and offering to pay his and the court's costs. The preacher accepted, and the vicar donated £5 in gold sovereigns to PM funds.³⁰ It is perhaps a measure of the changing temper of the times in that only 18 years previously, the Vicar of Rochdale had unleashed the dragoons at St Peter's Fields, and two years later the same man had sentenced Samuel Waller. The small number of attested instances, the pattern that after a custodial sentence in an area prosecutions stopped or resulted in no further action, and the general refusal of PM defendants to accept the court's findings, together suggest that benches sometimes initially tried to stamp out what they saw as a public nuisance rather than a threat to religion, but gave up when they realised they were facing civil disobedience.

The final case identified from newspaper coverage did not add to the PM total. It concerned an 1843 case of arrest for obstruction and assault upon the police in London. A crowd had gathered in Kingsland Road to hear George Ray, a Prim preacher, praying aloud; a policeman who intervened was asked by another activist and local preacher William Nunn, who was awaiting his turn to speak, not to interfere at least until the prayer ended. When it became clear that this would not be soon, the policeman tried to remove the PM speaker, but was prevented from doing so by Nunn, who claimed that the rostrum was his property and they had a right to preach in public. The policeman told both men to go home; Ray consented and was not charged; Nunn continued to obstruct him, so was arrested. Nunn's case is not celebrated by the Prims, because he was a Wesleyan suffering

³⁰ *Manchester Times*, 3rd June 1837.

for his faith while the Prim activist went free; but it is not celebrated by the old connexion either, because the two movements had different self-images to maintain.³¹

It is unlikely that these cases failed to come to connexional notice: both were newsworthy, and by the later date the centre of Prim operations was already based in the metropolis. Flesher as magazine editor, and Petty as subsequent chronicler of events, no doubt shared a desire to draw back from Church's rhetoric, by insisting on dealing with the Connexion's early years in a more balanced way and seeking to portray the Prims in a more respectable light; but they also found it expedient to deal sotto voce with stories departing from the heroic image. Once overlooked, such cases escaped the notice of later writers – until automated searches of press articles exposed them anew.

Less understandably though, the reality was on view in the autobiography of Thomas Russell, the itinerant jailed in Oxfordshire in 1830, aged 24. He penned, in addition to his autobiography, a memorial for his first wife and a lengthy article in praise of the Bourne brothers.³² He had moved to their home in his teens while he honed his skills, after which he itinerated for over half a century, and the autobiography deals at length with a number of episodes of hostility. These were concentrated in a short period between 1829 and 1831, and occurred in Berkshire and Oxfordshire; but even there they were sporadic. Yet the hostility, as argued above, was more probably endemic than orchestrated. For example, mob hostility towards him in April 1830 was quelled by the authorities.³³ He was jailed towards the end of the following month due to the actions of two magistrates, but after release continued to work in the area unmolested.

³¹ Reported in the *Standard*, London, 12th Sept 1843.

³² Russell's *Writings* were a posthumous reissue of all three works.

³³ Russell, *Writings*, p. 29.

The claim usually found in secondary sources, that he was imprisoned for hawking without a licence by selling tracts and bibles,³⁴ is not supported by his account. It was the pretext for his arrest, but the charge for which he stood trial was vagrancy; and when he refused to pay the fine of £10, he was jailed. The intention was to halt his preaching, and the revised charge was perhaps intended to avoid an appeal that would probably succeed and certainly direct antipathy towards the bench. Russell was released early after a public outcry, and pressed to prosecute the magistrate (the vagrancy charge hinged on non-existent proof that he was begging) but refused to do so. The same magistrate later suffered some loss as a result of PM activity, but was advised by fellow bench-members that he had injured himself already by his original action, and would only magnify it by pursuing any more.³⁵ Russell recognised – although later writers apparently did not – that he was the victim of a maverick magistrate, not a concerted vendetta and that his suffering, as well as being newsworthy, meant that he was probably thereafter untouchable by the authorities in Oxfordshire. Thomas Church's work implied that Russell's fate in the county was common to most PM activists; Russell's account shows it was not even typical for him over his half-century of devotion to the cause. Yet it is Church's work that is cited, not Russell's.

THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY LEGACY

The most extensive history of the movement was written in the Edwardian era, probably in 1906, by Holliday Kendall, named after Thomas Holliday, the man who headed the John Stamp enquiry.³⁶ A third-generation itinerant imbued from an early age with the Prim

³⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 332; also Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 223ff. which gives a fuller account.

³⁵ Russell, *Writings*, pp. 30-56.

³⁶ The last President to be photographed was that for 1905 (Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 498); the 1907 formation of the UMC is not mentioned.

legends, he was one of the earliest graduates in the PM ministry, and as Book-Room editor, had unrestricted access to the archives. He was also a moderniser committed to reunification of the various Methodist strands, later contributing the PM component of a 1909 work paving the way for it, following the 1907 formation of the United Methodist Church.³⁷ The closing decades of the nineteenth century had seen pious biographies of Bourne and Clowes, and of lesser-known individuals, together with a steady stream of memoirs;³⁸ in addition to them, and central records that did not exist in 1859, Kendall also had another half-century of history to record; and the development of photography meant that he could call upon images of some iconic chapels and also of notable early figures in their later years. It was thus even more informative than Petty's earlier effort, and consequentially some of his judgements about the Connexion's early history are probably broader and better-contextualised than Petty's; but others will undoubtedly suffer because he did not have the latter's personal familiarity with the people and the events at issue. Kendall remained discreet and respectful towards the founders, but he recognised Bourne's habit of claiming an exclusive role that he did not merit, as well as the importance of men such as James Steele, and the economic clout of some of the early stalwarts. He was also at pains to show that the heroic age of the Prims was over by 1843.

The Jubilee era had seen the contrasting writings of the histrionic Church and the sober Petty; a similar contrast recurred at the Centenary. The PM conference of 1909 saw the 12th annual lecture in honour of Sir William Hartley; it was a great success, with the published version running to five editions in under twelve months. Delivered by Joseph Ritson, this followed the bruising infighting surrounding the PM decision to draw back

³⁷ Holliday B. Kendall, 'The Primitive Methodist Church' in Townsend et al., *New History*, vol 1, p. 560ff.

³⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 35-6, refers to an unnamed writer of an 1854 tract against Clowes in terms that suggest the document may have been destroyed in the Edwardian era. Neither it nor others cited by him appears in searches of the MARC catalogue.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Discourse

from reunification. This clever appeal to the refuseniks was a better version of Thomas Church's paean to the founding generation, reassuring a restive Edwardian audience that the leadership had not forgotten how much they owed those who had suffered to create what was now a significant national church, but also emphasising that the future was yet to be won, claiming that

this all too inadequate tribute to the makers of Primitive Methodism has been penned in the hope that it may kindle in the hearts of [the descendants of the heroic men and saintly women who freely gave their lives to the work of founding this church] a deeper loyalty and a more passionate enthusiasm, so that the closing celebrations of the Centenary may...lead on to a grander future.³⁹

As with the Church work, Ritson's lecture made no attempt to be historically balanced and merely recycled favourite stories of early luminaries. Yet it was recently described as one of the best histories of the denomination.⁴⁰

Individual PM writers continued to produce personal works and reminiscences, and there was a surge of material around the time of the 1932 reunion, but the only significant publications, for modern scholars of Primitive Methodism that is, to emerge from the Methodist family over the following half-century or so were the works of Robert Wearmouth and John Wilkinson. Both were ordained scholars, but men of very different stripes. Wearmouth wrote social history within a denominational tradition: for him, the Prims were a Divine conduit for working-class talent, and he had been a beneficiary.⁴¹ Wilkinson was an academic, one time librarian, later Head, of Hartley Victoria College, and a significant contributor to the historical record.⁴² A Methodist loyalist and clearly an

³⁹ Ritson, *Romance*, preface, v., re-ordered for clarity by inserting the section in parenthesis from an adjacent sentence.

⁴⁰ Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 136.

⁴¹ Most notably, Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Struggle of the Working Classes*, Leicester, 1954.

⁴² John Wilkinson, *William Clowes, 1780 – 1851*, London, 1951; also *Bourne*, 1952; the same author, 'The Rise of Other Methodist Traditions' in Davies, R., and Rupp, G., (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols, London, 1968 onwards, vol 2, p. 276ff (hereafter HMCGB and vol no.); and the same author, 'The non-Wesleyan Traditions from 1849' in HMCGB, vol 3, p. 167ff. Wilkinson's transcriptions

admirer of Bourne, he was generous to a fault in recognising and forgiving the flaws in his character; but it was academically imprudent to have followed the Bourne line in the autobiographies in several key respects. He was, though, not to know that a rather more famous historian would absorb his account of Bourne's life and times with barely a critical second look – and without reading the Journal transcriptions that would have alerted him to the flaws in the autobiographical claims.

One very recent work offers a reminder of the persistence of the legends. They were so ingrained that the collective folk-memory survived for generations after reunification. Kenneth Lysons, a retired Methodist minister, records how his father, a lifelong Primitive, refused to allow the local vicar to provide tutorial assistance in Latin because of old insults offered to the Prims by the established church.⁴³

THE SOCIAL HISTORIANS

Edward Thompson, son of the manse and ex-pupil of Kingswood, went far beyond Wearmouth's works, apparently needed little prompting to accept Bourne's account, retailed via Wilkinson, of the Wesleyan disregard for the poor and the outcast of North Staffordshire; but for him it was social, not religious. He contended, in the words of David Bebbington, 'that popular religion was a form of stunted radicalism', and that the PM Connexion was a manifestation of this, a rare instance of a church that embodied a religion of the people.⁴⁴ By contrast, the Wesleyans were the craven tool of the establishment, enthusiastically keeping the working class in its place. Not all historians agreed: for

were unpublished and unattributed, and the editorship is based on the catalogue entry in the card-index, CSRO.

⁴³ Kenneth Lysons, *A Little Primitive: Primitive Methodism from Macro and Micro Perspectives*, Buxton, 2001, pp. 238-9.

⁴⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p. 114.

example Robert Currie was at pains to observe, later that decade, that whatever the reported differences in their followers, the schismatic variants on Wesleyanism were generally led by the relatively well-placed.⁴⁵ Yet it is Thompson's broad – and ill-evidenced – assertion not Currie's careful observation that seems to have held sway. Obelkevich, as noted in the opening chapter, was the most enthusiastic adherent to this view, but by no means alone.

Thus Thompson's account of Wesleyanism may attract less support today, yet his characterisation of the Prims as a bastion of inchoate class-consciousness has proved enduring. In Werner's 1984 *History*, the 'call to preach could be heard and accepted by virtually anyone', and it was the consequential fact that PM preachers were the authentic voice of the people that differentiated them from the competition.⁴⁶ Yet among the 27 names Werner cites as important early activists, 16 were of independent means or were businessmen or farmers, and four more were probably from comfortable backgrounds: Hathorn, a former Army officer; Harrison, the short-lived itinerant whose family servants first told him of the Ranters' arrival; Goodrich, 'a man of considerable education, a solicitor's clerk'; and Thomas King, 'a man of more than ordinary intelligence and education'.⁴⁷ While six of the remaining seven may well have been poor (nothing is known of three of them; two were funded by John Benton, so lacked independent means, and the sixth was John Oxtoby, an agricultural labourer and former Wesleyan local preacher) the treatment of the seventh man is instructive. He was James Crawford. By the mid-twentieth century, his indigent status was unarguable; a 1955 *PWHS* article, relying solely upon Bourne's autobiographical account, described him as an unemployed farm

⁴⁵ Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p.55.

⁴⁶ Werner, *History*: call to preach, p. 141; authentic voice, p. 85; see also Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 117.

⁴⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 68, 180, 331 and 205 respectively.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Discourse

labourer, and this was repeated by Watts in 1995, offering a view echoed by Garrett, apparently sourced from other of Bourne's retrospective writings.⁴⁸ Oddly, though, while Langton noted that the Bourne brothers supported Crawford to the tune of some £40 between late 1809 and 1811 (when the fledgling connexion took over the burden), Bourne's 1811 diaries record that Crawford was robbed of exactly that amount of money, which indicates that he was not indigent; but this has not hitherto been recognised as a challenge to the retrospective claim.⁴⁹ The tone of references in an Independent Methodist history to him as an important activist among the Wesleyan splinters emerging in the years around 1800 indicate that the diary image should be preferred.⁵⁰ It appears that the pioneer activists were neither elite nor dispossessed; yet the weight of published characterisations leans towards the latter.

Subsequent doctoral theses have taken a social perspective, including one by an ordained Methodist, Stephen Hatcher, which concluded that of the six key factors in the movement's success, four were secular matters of class or gender.⁵¹ These were: its homely and intimate character; fellowship occasions for the economically and socially displaced; the opportunities for participation and leadership; and its greater scope for female participation. Hatcher's data relate to the period commencing 1819, and are restricted to Hull, but offer important insights. The Mill Street chapel that would be a financial burden to the congregation for years could be built as quickly as it was because four of the inaugural members recruited by Clowes advanced most of the cost of the project, which

⁴⁸ Edward Langton, 'James Crawford: The Forest Mystic' in *PWHS XXX*, vol. 1, p. 14. It rests on Bourne's autobiographical writings. This is then cited by Watts (*The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 252-3) to underpin his argument concerning the remuneration of PM itinerants; but another earlier reference (*Ibid.*, p. 139) to Crawford is juxtaposed with the previously cited description of Bourne as a carpenter, ultimately reliant upon Bourne's autobiographical account. Later, Garrett ('PM in Shropshire', p. 50) describes Crawford as a 'poor man'.

⁴⁹ Bourne Journals, F f. 194; A Text, f. 293; B Text, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Arthur Mounfield, *A Short History of Independent Methodism*, Warrington, 1905, p. 20, brackets his name with those of Bourne and Clowes as an important visitor.

⁵¹ Hatcher, PM in Hull, p. 549ff.

was over 60 years' pay for a labourer.⁵² Kendall omits to state this when marvelling at the challenge;⁵³ and discourse may well have been operative long before that: of 15 class-leaders recorded in the 1830s at Hull, all but two featured in the local directory, and thus were people of at least modest substance. More tellingly, eight of them appeared in PM records with a humbler status than that stated by the gazetteers. In a connexion where it was an honour to be accorded the designation 'praying labourer' it may be that followers, from even this early date, had a penchant for self-describing in unduly humble terms; fed on Bourne's heroic diet, such actions would hardly be surprising.

Table 3.1 Early Hull Class Leaders

Name	Connexional description	Gazetteer entry
Hodge, J	Labourer	Foreman
Hodge, W	Sawyer/Seedcrusher	Foreman
Laverack	Bricklayer (1840); Labourer (1843)	Brickmaker
Leach	Wheelwright	Engineer
Locking	Blacksmith	Lace Manufacturer
Walker	Foreman	Bookkeeper
Wallis	Labourer	Blacking Manufacturer
Wilkinson	Ship's Carpenter	Ship & Boat-BUILDER

Today, the Prims' humble origins are a given, as a few further examples will confirm. Thus Snell and Ell erred in stating that the Prims 'appealed to "the ruler of the lower class", as Kendall put it', when in fact he denied that. The quotation marks appear in the original too, because Kendall did not 'put it' this way. He was quoting from someone else who did, in order to dispute it. Kendall's argument is that such an account might have been true before 1843 but that it was not true thereafter, and he cites a contemporary source in support of this.⁵⁴

⁵² Hatcher, PM in Hull, p. 154.

⁵³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 374.

⁵⁴ Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, pp. 136, 306; Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 160/1.

The movement seen by Wearmouth and others as a cradle of socialism – British-style – was in its first several decades anything but: the 1821 Conference decided, at Bourne's behest, to expel a 'speeching radical', and the apparently surprising failure of the Prims to deliver up any outstanding Chartists of note is not so puzzling when one considers the fate of John Skevington, a secondary figure on the 'peaceful means' wing. A former itinerant, Loughborough businessman, and son of a founding figure of Leicestershire Primitive Methodism, he was hounded out of the movement for his Chartist sympathies and denied readmission, thanks to Bourne's influence in Loughborough circuit. Later figures in the movement may have quietly deplored his exile, but there is little reason to think that the connexion had much class allegiance to the bulk of their followers, or political sympathy with those attacking their temporal hardships, around 1840.⁵⁵ Even in the 1870s and 1880s, its cautious support for the workers in industrial relations was based on the need for non-aggressive and cooperative stances by both sides.

Next, is the case of how historians have treated Wedgwood's 1817 imprisonment at Grantham. The fact is cited by Werner, based on intervening secondary sources,⁵⁶ but she re-orders the facts, underplaying the political backdrop. It is better-recognised both by Kendall and Walford,⁵⁷ who may be summarised as follows. A camp-meeting was planned to be held near the town, in the grounds of a local baronet, Sir William Manners. Wedgwood had preached unhindered in the streets of Grantham previously, and was the honoured guest of a well-heeled local figure whenever he visited the town. But when he returned to stimulate interest by more street-preaching he was arrested. Unbeknown to him, Manners' support for the Prims was part of his campaign against the church party hostile to his political ambitions. William Lockwood, former Wesleyan itinerant, pioneer

⁵⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 336/7.

⁵⁶ Werner, *History*, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 251ff; Walford, *Life*, ii, pp. 17-18.

preacher for the Prims in Staffordshire, and a man of substance in Nottinghamshire, arrived in his gig to defend Wedgwood's right to preach, only to share his fate. He stood bail, and was promptly released. According to Petty, Wedgwood did likewise, but later writers claim that he refused, relenting only in order to attend the planned camp meeting.⁵⁸ The baronet conducted him thence in style, lent William Clowes a horse,⁵⁹ and built a small preaching podium on his own land overlooking the place of arrest. He had John Benton preach from it in order to continue to embarrass his opponents.

Lockwood and Wedgwood duly came to trial, and might easily have been convicted, given the flexibility of England's obstruction laws. Yet the magistrates threw the case out. To read Petty's account, they were overawed by Wedgwood's powerful ally; more probably, it was their recognition that nothing was to be gained by extending the martyrdom of a naïve pawn in a political game. Kendall's and Walford's accounts are a little more generous than this, but come close to accepting that that is what occurred. Wedgwood may have been used as a pawn, but it was an object-lesson in the publicity value of principled disobedience.

In the final instance of modern skewing, both Werner and Edward Thompson culled a single sentence from Bourne's autobiography:

Our chapels were the coal-pit banks, or any other place; and in our conversation way we preached the gospel to all, good or bad, rough or smooth.⁶⁰

For them, here is the authentic image of the first Prims: lacking premises, they preached outdoors; lacking congregations, they preached wherever they could find an audience. But

⁵⁸ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 73; Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 255ff.

⁵⁹ Clowes, *Journals*, p. 128.

⁶⁰ Werner, *History*, p. 55; Thompson, *English Working Class*, p. 397. Both cite Wilkinson, *Bourne*, p. 32; he sourced it from the 1840s autobiographies. Werner omitted the word 'banks', no doubt for an American audience.

Bourne here was marginalising the contributions of Clowes and the orators, asserting that his approach to gaining converts and followers – ‘in our conversation way’ and not via revivalist oratory – was the key to PM success. He was half-right: without the pulling-power of the orators, there was insufficient interest; without an effective follow-up organisation the orators produced too many false starts. Ambler rightly noted that this was a consistent theme in Lincolnshire.⁶¹ He did not draw a further inference, though, from one of his cited examples: Francis Birch reported in September 1820 that the local populace had encountered PM preachers previously; if so it can only have been twelve months or so earlier. Yet the local recollection extended only to the throwing of eggs. The folk-memory was not of the faith message or the administrative incompetence that produced no follow-up, but of the colourful details of the preacher’s travails.

It helped to reinforce the legends of a movement born in adversity, and to deflect attention from the Prims’ slow acquisition of the skills that powered its growth. In Currie’s model, the Prims set out with all the skills required for its first transitional process, but had to acquire the others. To a greater or lesser degree, each of these recent writers implicitly assumes the humble status of the Prims, and then seeks to confirm it; but by erecting a framework of self-evident truth into which snippets of past events are pigeon-holed, with inconvenient fragments discarded or treated as exceptional, the evidence cannot then be read any other way.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined how a discourse of heroic adversity rapidly took hold – and how, in consequence, scholars have bypassed or down-valued evidence that conflicts with

⁶¹ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p. 34.

Chapter 3: The Problem of Discourse

it. Hugh Bourne created it, out of religious conviction, but also out of personal ambition to be regarded as the sole founder of the movement. Its key components are: the founders' humble origins; the recourse to inspired, not trained, preachers; the abandonment of a latter-day biblical poor by other religious denominations, thereby establishing the Prims' special mission; the privations undergone by the early preachers as they braved mob violence, hunger, bad weather and arduous journeys on foot to take the word to the needy; the hostility expressed towards them by secular authorities as well as religious competitors; and the signs of divine intervention. By downplaying or overlooking evidence that did not fit the foregoing, Bourne generated a series of legends that quickly became fact for the followers, a behavioural template for the activists, and an explanatory framework for their triumphs and failures alike. The legends were then turned to a different purpose, being incorporated by social historians into a larger account of how class became the dominant political reality in Britain.

Two sources less susceptible to Bourne's discourse are the connexion's numbers, and the newspaper evidence which reflects how the Prims were seen by others rather than by themselves. This chapter brings these two perspectives together. There are commonly-agreed Primitive Methodist membership numbers in an almost unbroken sequence from 1819 (the totals in 1826 and 1827 were unpublished) but earlier numbers are more conjectural. Perhaps because of that – and also the small numbers involved – most writers have been content to deal impressionistically with the pre-1819 years. This thesis asserts that they are essential to understanding what the later numbers tell us; and underlying that is the importance of place.

TUNSTALL'S ROLE

As suggested in the opening chapter, one model for creating a competitor to Wesleyanism entailed an alliance between prosperous laymen and lay preachers, the latter providing the effort and the cohesion, the former the support, encouragement, advice, funds, and organisational nous. Tunstall had no religious outlet of any kind until a Wesleyan chapel opened in 1789, and although the Anglicans arrived in 1832, these two were the Prims' only religious competitors as late as 1851. So the area's rapidly developing pottery manufacture was attracting and creating prosperous groups of people beyond the reach of squirearchy. The builder of that 1789 chapel, Joseph Smith, owned significant tracts of land in the town, and he was a former local preacher and official in the old connexion, although he was apparently not in favour of the developing itinerant domination of his church; his cousin, James Steele, was a local steward, class-leader and local preacher. From 1808, Smith provided a home for semi-detached groups of Methodists for Friday-night prayer meetings and worship but this attracted no opposition from the circuit

leadership in Burslem; and when the infant movement outgrew his accommodation, another temporary home was found in the factory premises of a supporter. This absence of external opposition and vested interests, plus prosperous potential supporters who might be minded to resist trends in the old connexion made Tunstall a particularly favourable breeding-ground for a Napoleonic-era challenger to Wesleyanism.

THE PREPARATORY YEARS

Existing histories overstate the cohesiveness within and separateness between the Camp-Meeting Methodists (CMM) and the Clowesites, being respectively preachers associated with Hugh Bourne, and allies of William Clowes (some identify a third, more amorphous, group of 'Steelites', but they can only have emerged in 1811). Thus a group of farmers near Ramsor in East Staffordshire are now seen as associated with Bourne, yet Clowes was a regular visitor, and some of the men now seen as Clowesites preached at CMM venues. Bourne also laid claim to the leaders of three distinct groups: James Crawford, a former Wesleyan local preacher who led a group named the Magic Methodists (although he would be financially supported by the Bournes, he was not really a camp-meeting operator); John Benton, a prosperous man from South Staffordshire who led a number of congregations around Cannock; and Mary Dunnell, some of whose followers decamped when she and Bourne parted company. All were active for a period of years within or on the fringes of the Wesleyan Connexion. They formed pockets of potential followers distributed in a triangle roughly centred on Tunstall, from Risley (Warrington) in the west to Hollington near Derby in the east, to Cannock in the south. The furthest reach was two days' walk from Tunstall. The main concentration was at the centre, where Steele's Wesleyan classes had followed the example of Clowes' supporters. Map 1 shows the earliest preaching-places.

1811-1819

The pattern of affiliation has given rise to uncertainty about the extent and scale of the initial movement. Both Bourne and Clowes stated (and Petty accepted) that the movement had about 200 initial followers.¹ Yet they meant different things. This emerges only on close reading, and the detailed differences are telling. Bourne would later claim that his antecedent Camp Meeting movement had 10 preachers and 100 followers in 1810, although Walford, citing a CMM preaching-plan of March 1810, lists 11 preachers and 11 preaching-places.² They comprise six places around Ramsor, four around Warrington, and one at Macclesfield – with none, it may be noted, around Tunstall/Bemersley. The preachers however are distributed quite differently, with the majority based around Tunstall. Bourne would then claim a total of 200 at the time of the inaugural general meeting in July 1811 (this appears to be the figure settled upon by Petty).³ Clowes suggests that the 200 figure relates to September, by which time the movement had 17 preachers and 17 preaching-places as shown in the circuit plan.⁴ Bourne by contrast claimed on 27th September 1811 that the movement by then had up to 30 preachers and 30 preaching-places.⁵ It included 18, not 17, places on the ‘Sunday plan’; the 12 unplanned venues were five around Ramsor; three around Cannock, three more about six miles beyond Oxford; and a solitary London congregation. His preachers included 17 on the main plan, three more at Ramsor, one at Rocester and two anticipated at Cannock Wood – neither named – plus a list of potential women preachers. Both in relation to the 1810 plan and the September 1811 claim, Bourne’s lists do not make immediate sense. The 1810 preacher list featured only three names that survived to appear on the PM plan the

¹ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 38

² Bourne A Text, f. 306; Walford, *Life*, i, p. 276.

³ Bourne Journals, F f. 145.

⁴ Clowes, *Journals*, p. 97, Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 114.

⁵ Bourne Journals, F f. 162.

following year; and the 1811 list includes at least nine anticipated arrivals. The places list for 1810 includes only six that appear on one or more of the first three plans of the combined body. The reasons for the discrepancy – apart from anticipation of future recruits – appear to be twofold. The outlets near Oxford and in London (possibly also at Macclesfield) were groups of like mind acting independently: they were aligned, but not affiliated. The other places absent from ‘the Sunday plan’ were not additional congregations, but subsidiary venues.⁶

Walford, Bourne’s first biographer, suggests a figure of 400 initial followers for the combined movement but, based on the places cited this appears to relate to March 1812.⁷ The purpose of these higher claims was to support the assertion that Primitive Methodism evolved from the CMM movement expanded by a few stragglers and arrivistes. But closer reading of the plans and claims – and the locations of the earliest chapels – calls that into doubt. Neither of the 1811 chapels (Tunstall and Boylestone) appears on the 1810 CMM plans – indeed the latter was built the year *before* it was recognised on PM preaching-plans. A recent article disputes this, blaming it on errors of recording, and in particular on Bourne’s flawed recall.⁸ This places rather too much emphasis on the autobiographical account, and not enough on the pattern of preaching-places: as Map 1 shows, with the exception of Ramsor itself, none of the East Staffs/West Derbyshire venues affiliated until 1812. A more reasonable interpretation is that there was a set of around forty congregations and up to fifteen preachers operating on the fringes of official Methodism within 20 miles or so of Tunstall; some of the congregations were recognised venues receiving fortnightly (or less frequent) planned Wesleyan worship, but others were not; the

⁶ Both Bourne and Clowes called regularly and worshipped at the homes of prosperous individuals across Staffordshire and Cheshire, and some were home to classes: Kendall, *Origin*, i, passim, but especially pp. 92, 107.

⁷ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 329.

⁸ Stella Mills, ‘The First Primitive Methodist Chapel: The Claim for Boylestone’, in *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 58, part 5, May 2012, pp. 220-225.

preachers however were unrecognised by the old connexion, and the strengths of the congregation-preacher links varied from relatively close association (Dunnell and Crawford, and to a lesser extent, Benton) to little more than a preparedness to receive visits from charismatic preachers. So when the idea of a combined body emerged, most of the preachers but only eight of the congregations risked taking the plunge. There was no reservoir of extra preachers, but belated affiliation of existing but hesitant congregations powered the rise in the first year or two.⁹ The first two plans suggest initially affiliation was the isolated case of Ramsor plus places within a two-hour walk of Tunstall; the third plan included places that were a two-day journey away.

In summary thus far, Bourne's venues and numbers must be regarded as dubious, in that he has included other groups, and classes as well as worship venues. The 200 figure for 1811 may be more appropriate to September than June, and there is no reason to doubt that Walford's figure of 400 was about right if applied to 1812. Equally, a figure of 800 (700 of which were in Tunstall circuit) for 1816 is of the right order.¹⁰ The point of departure here is that in this year, the Tunstall circuit was obliged to concede a separate Derby circuit to Benton as the price of keeping him on board. By late 1818, Tunstall was still mired around the 700 mark, but Derby – by now missioning into Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, and with its headquarters relocated to Nottingham – was rapidly adding new members. Yet Tunstall had added significantly to its stock of preachers, and was adding new outlets at the same rate. The problem was that there, it actually had slightly fewer members per preaching-place in 1818 than there had been in 1811. Benton's maverick behaviour was finally producing the members, but only once others had begun to provide the pastoral follow-up he could not or would not undertake; and by the time that

⁹ The pattern of progressive affiliation shown in Map 7 is detailed in the first three plans: Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 559, 114 and 134. Although only 34 places featured on the 1812 plan, six had already fallen by the wayside: all would reappear in later years.

¹⁰ Werner, *History*, p. 82.

the growth really began to impact, he had already retired from the fray on ill-health grounds in May 1818, and even after recovery never resumed his itinerant habits, although he remained a supporter and funder of the movement.¹¹ By 1819 the continuation of his work had turned the 800 PM total of 1816 into almost 4000.¹² This initial 'slow burn' character of growth in the East Midlands is of crucial significance in interrogating the Bourne (and Walford) account of what happened – see Chapter 5.

1819 – 1825

This period began with a Nottingham planning meeting to coordinate activity across what was now four circuits (the former Derby circuit had been divided, and Clowes had earlier opened Hull, with rapid and spectacular results). The consolidation era was officially over: the movement doubled in each of the first two years, then doubled again in the following four years to reach 34,000.¹³ By the end of this phase, the movement's strength lay in a string of counties from Shropshire to Lincolnshire, plus Norfolk to the south, and the East Riding of Yorkshire to the north; but Hull's itinerants were now missioning well beyond these core counties, into the West and North Ridings, East Lancashire, Durham, Cumberland, Northumberland, London and Cornwall. Some measure of the speed and intensity of PM penetration can be gathered from the 1851 Religious Census. It shows that the Prims had 51 dedicated chapels built or acquired by the connexion up to and including 1825 in the coastal counties of the East Riding of Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk.¹⁴

¹¹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 352 ff. Benton continued to be associated with, but not to preach for, the Prims; he was a trustee and mortgagee of Loughborough's Dead Lane chapel the following year – Ibid, p. 316.

¹² Petty, *History*, pp. 80, 86; this writer's calculations.

¹³ Citations for these and all subsequent connexional totals are given at Table 1 below.

¹⁴ John Wolffe, (ed), *Yorkshire Returns of the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, Vol 1: Introduction, City of York and East Riding*, York, 2000; R. A. Ambler, (ed), *Lincolnshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship, 1851*, Lincoln, 1979; Janet Ede and Norma Virgoe, (eds), *Religious worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance at Worship*, Cambridge, 1998.

1825-1828

Revivalism worked; but it relied upon a rapid expansion of preacher numbers, and although the preparatory meeting had decided that the connexion needed to impose minimum standards of operational, liturgical and theological compliance (sober dress, regular written reports, pithy and plain preaching, only acceptable beliefs to be advanced from the pulpit) in practice there was no control mechanism to assure that that was the case. The 1819 rules had been intended to remedy a broad 'gap in discipline', but had instead only excluded the illiterate from itinerancy and provided a stream of anecdotes for retelling in the Connexional magazine.¹⁵ Suitably beefed-up and policed, they restored the movement to health, slimmer by 2000 members, and without the incompetent preachers.

1829-1861

With its administration patched up if not yet fit for purpose, the movement first resumed modest growth, and then accelerated to over 10% pa in the mid-1830s declining to a more manageable 3-4% pa in the early 1840s. This further declined to a mere 1% pa in the late 1840s. There was then a growth spike, to 10% then 4% in 1849-50, and 1850-51.¹⁶ That though was clearly in part fallout from the Wesleyan Fly Sheets controversy, as would be apparent in the following decade. Overall though, this period saw the movement's transformation from a North Midlands to a national one. The impact of that spike on the findings of the Religious Census was however small. According to calculations by Watts, the connexion had an average density, in terms of adult attenders per 100 population of 1.95, ranked fifth behind the Anglicans, Wesleyans, Congregationalists and Baptists. It

¹⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 352 (discipline) and p. 520 (requirement to maintain written records, and highlights to be submitted to circuit committees monthly). The 1822 *PMMs* contained no fewer than 25 extracts from preachers' journals.

¹⁶ Currie et al., *Churches and Churchgoers*, p. 141.

was present in every English county other than Devon (possibly a data error), ranked fourth in six counties, and third in a further ten, where only Anglicans and Wesleyans outdid them. In two counties, Shropshire and Norfolk, it was second only to the established church. It was surprisingly strong in the Thames Valley (missioned from Shropshire), yet the bulk of the south-east was a very poor recruiting-ground despite sustained efforts over three decades. The counties of Warwickshire and Lancashire were also poor, and their performance stood in sharp contrast with their neighbours. So the movement might be national, but its geography was distinctive, and its areas of relative absence obey no simple north-south, urban-rural divide.

The connexion suffered a decline after 1851, reversed in the run-up to the Jubilee. There is an interesting divergence here between the retrospective and contemporary accounts. At a distance of five decades, Kendall blamed external factors of hardship and emigration; Petty writing at the end of the 1850s noted that the decline experienced had been modest given the conjunction of Wesleyanism's travails and the death of the founders. At local level, there was good episodic evidence to support Kendall's stance; for example the congregation of Chrishall, Essex, lost 119 members in 1855 alone, its leaders blaming emigration and impoverishment.¹⁷ Yet the connexion suffered such local losses fairly regularly, but managed to absorb them within the growth occurring elsewhere, a process much assisted by the rapid population growth of the time. These losses gain spurious significance because they occurred at a time of connexion-wide setback; and to an Edwardian pro-unifier, they were a better explanation than blaming fellow-Methodists. As noted above, the slowdown began in the late 1840s, and was masked by two very good years in 1849-51. On balance, Petty's judgement is preferable. The 4% pa growth was

¹⁷ Archival researches conducted by J Cooper and published in a local history web-site consulted 14th August 2011: www.recordingtuttlesfordhistory.org.uk/ULHRdone/primitivemethodistsinvillages.htm.

Chapter 4: The Growth Era in Context

resumed in the run-up to the Jubilee – the movement regarded 1860 as its 50th year, rather than awaiting 1861 when it would have completed the half-century.

THE JUBILEE PERSPECTIVE AND BEYOND

The connexion could look back at the Jubilee with pride and optimism, as shown:

Table 4.1: Numbers of ticket-holding Primitive Methodists in Great Britain:

Date	Membership	Annual % growth
1811	200	
1812	400	-
1816	800	-
1819	3900	70
1820	7800	100
1821	16000	109
1825	34000	21
1828	32000	-2
1831	37000	5
1836	62000	11
1841	76000	4
1846	86000	3
1851	106000	4
1856	104000	0
1861	128000	4

Note: Figures for 1820, 1825 and 1828 are sourced from connexional records via Petty; 1819 is his estimate;¹⁸ and those for 1811-1816 are estimates based on claims by Walford, Clowes and Bourne.¹⁹ All other numbers are sourced from Gilbert; a comparison with the place-by-place returns in successive Conference Minutes shows that his figures relate to all membership apart from Ireland and overseas circuits, although the Welsh and Scottish components were never large.²⁰ Figures to 1820 are rounded to the nearest hundred, thereafter to the nearest 1000. Annual % growth rates are omitted prior to 1816, as the answers are potentially misleading.

It seemed to have returned to strong growth, and with its closest competitor in trouble, emerged from the Jubilee brimming with confidence. The period was marked by increased activism and fund-raising for new chapels. The progress over the first 50 years seemed to

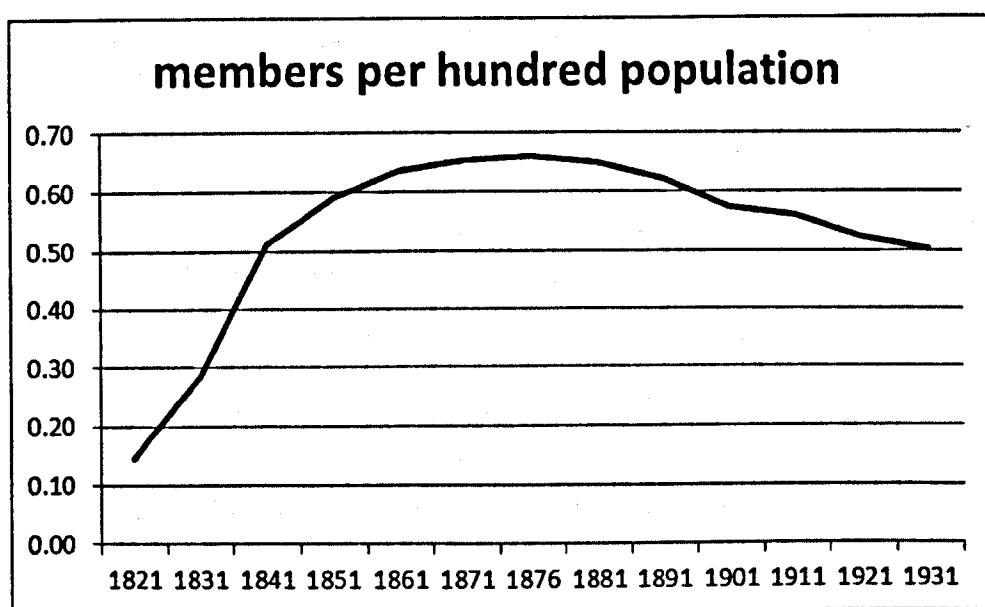
¹⁸ Petty, *History*, p. 204.

¹⁹ Walford and Clowes figures discussed earlier; Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 86.

²⁰ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 31.

confirm that, but it was probably their high-water mark. The graph below shows the England and Wales member density profile,²¹ but this flatters the Prims' performance because it fails to reflect a progressive phenomenon that impacted on all Methodists: the erosion of the attender-member ratio. This is likely therefore to have meant that the peak arrived earlier, and the decline was more precipitous, than shown here:

Figure 4



Membership growth fell back to under 2% pa by the mid-, and only 1% pa in the late, 1860s. The Methodist historian who basked in the 30,000 increases in PM numbers in that decade had omitted to note that fully one-third of that came from outside Great Britain.²² Wearmouth, though, was merely reflecting the perception of the contemporary leadership who clearly believed the possibly suspect published figures and embarked upon the 'chapel-building era'.²³ According to Kendall, between 1863 and 1872, the connexion

²¹ As discussed in Chapter 1, fn19, the totals include a very small proportion of Scottish members. This has no material impact on the shape of the density curve.

²² Wearmouth, *Struggle*, p. 102; compare the decennial gain with the figures in Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 31.

²³ The Connexional minutes of 1861 sought to reconcile members and hearers (by which they then meant the total of Sabbath attendances on a single Sunday as a follow-up to the 1851 Religious Census), but when hearers began to appear annually in published returns a decade later, the totals bore no relationship to the earlier ones, having fallen from 655,886 in 1861 to 404,176 in 1871. Subsequent fluctuations strongly suggest that the definition of hearers continued to change thereafter too. (Minutes of Conference, consulted at Wesley Centre, Oxford)

built 1191 chapels, or just over two a week.²⁴ Yet this needs to be contextualised in terms of the economic challenge that it posed to the followers – a better guide to whether the burden produced a draining-away of activism – as measured by the rate of build per 1000 members. In the corresponding decade starting thirty years earlier, the movement built at least 259 chapels in just five counties.²⁵ That implied a build rate per 1000 members there over a third higher at the earlier date.²⁶ The Prims' era of expansion was meteoric but brief, even if its loss of reach was concealed by population growth until the Edwardian era. The 'chapel-building era' has been seen by writers such as Ambler and Obelkevich as evidence of gentrification causing growth to stop, as the movement became more concerned about organisation, its chapels, fund-raising, and social proprieties than about ongoing revivalism. Yet the clear message of the numbers is that the growth stopped first: what changed around the Jubilee was that hitherto, chapel building had been both a response to and a platform for growth; now it became a defensive route to retention. This view can be further tested by means of newspaper evidence, and that is the final topic of this chapter.

THE CONNEXION'S GROWING SOCIAL INCLUSION

The British Library's digitisation of a sample of 19th-century publications, mainly daily or weekly newspapers with regional circulation, makes it possible to measure how the

²⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 456.

²⁵ Derbyshire contributed 28 chapels between 1833 and 1842: Marjorie Tranter et al. (eds), *The Derbyshire Returns to the 1851 Religious Census*, Chesterfield, 1995. The East Riding of Yorkshire contributed another 30, Wolffe, 2000; Lincolnshire, 91 chapels, R. A. Ambler, 1979; Norfolk, 69 chapels, Ede and Virgoe, 2003. Shropshire contributed 41 to the total: Field, C., (ed), *Church and Chapel in Early Victorian Shropshire: Returns from the 1851 Census of Religious Worship*, Keele, 2004. The 1851 numbers of 1833-42 chapels still in use is a minimum which excludes any chapels built but given up.

²⁶ These five counties represented 26.6% of attendances in 1851, but were missioned earlier, on average, than the rest of the counties apart from Staffordshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Cheshire. Prudentially therefore their connexional share is assumed to be one-third in 1833-42. This gives a build rate of 1.13 chapels per 1000 per annum; the corresponding figure for 1863-72 for the entire connexion was 0.83. These counties would have needed to account for nearly 50% of the membership for the build rate to equal the later national figure – which clearly they did not.

movement was seen by others in a broad national perspective. The coverage was planned to reflect all regions, and erred towards publications that spanned all or substantially all of the nineteenth century. There was no publication from the Potteries, South Cheshire, or Shropshire, but coverage of the heartland areas is otherwise extensive; in addition the common practice of relaying stories between regions meant that news about apparently unsampled areas might appear elsewhere – sometimes as far away as Aberdeen, Belfast or Plymouth.²⁷

Chapter 3 included one instance of the corroborative power of the digital database; here the attention is rather broader. According to most accounts, the Bourne-Clowes years are the ‘heroic’ ones in which the connexion encountered its fiercest hostility; the movement was tarred with the dismissive ‘Ranter’ label in Belper in 1817, and the last jailing of an itinerant for street-preaching occurred in 1843. According to Obelkevich (see Chapter 1) and others, the descent to denominationalism occurred only slowly thereafter. This could be tested first by seeking out another of the movement’s most distinctive legends, its recourse to humble preachers; and second by tracking themes suggested by the actual coverage.

LEGENDARY PREACHERS

It is a commonplace that the connexion was uniquely welcoming to the inspired rather than the tutored, and there were six dismissive articles between 1825 and 1838 (of a total of 340 in the sample up to 1839), typically complaints about unfortunate metaphors offered by unskilled extemporising preachers. Yet as earlier researchers have found, the connexional authorities were equally concerned about preachers generating the wrong image for the

²⁷ Centres of publication in the sample lying with the PM heartland were: Blackburn, Bradford, Birmingham, Chester, Derby, Hull, Huddersfield, Lancaster, Leeds, Leicester, Liverpool, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Nottingham, Preston, Sheffield, Worcester, Wrexham and York.

connexion: as early as 1835/36, the Ludlow circuit authorities were counselling a preacher against the use of 'awkward expressions'.²⁸ To judge by the absence of articles mocking inarticulate PM preachers in digitised newspaper stories from 1840-1850, efforts such as those at Ludlow succeeded. The image of the preacher unhindered by handicaps of birth, age, gender or education was a powerful one; but not necessarily a reflection of long-term or dominant reality.

Not all of the inspired would have been lacking in these respects, of course; and the movement's embracing of young preachers, male and female, is undeniable. Equally, it is clear that the publicity value of using women was not lost on the leadership, nor was the fact that they were much less likely to get a hostile reception. The patterns between female and boy preachers differed so much that they need to be considered separately, even if the research issues are common to both: how common an occurrence this actually was, to what extent it was denominationally distinctive, and how the Prims deployed them.²⁹

Boy preachers did not attract nearly as much newspaper coverage as women, but that appears to reflect their lesser newsworthiness, not their frequency. For example, obituaries and retrospective pieces dating from the 1850s note that Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans had earlier used boy preachers, yet the contemporary press seem to have ignored them.³⁰ The first identified contemporaneous reference to any other denomination employing one dates from 1843, in a disapproving reference to a Wesleyan aged 15.³¹

²⁸ Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 135.

²⁹ Compound searches for terms such woman-women-female plus preacher-preaching and/or chapel-church-meeting and/or address-sermon-worship were employed to generate the cases surveyed. While these cannot guarantee to identify all cases, the gratifying decline in yield with each successive search tends to confirm that these represent the bulk of them.

³⁰ *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 15th February 1841 (referring to preaching around 1775); *Wrexham Advertiser*, 8th February 1873 (referring to an appointment around 1825); *Liverpool Mercury*, 6th July 1882 (referring to an 1816 appointment); *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 17th July 1885 (referring to an 1839 appointment).

³¹ *North Wales Chronicle*, 23rd May 1843.

Excluding American instances, this was one of only six cases found before 1850, one of which was an Ulster itinerant boy accompanied by his father conducting 'collections' for his education, in 1845.³² The remainder were PM cases, one boy appearing three times in 1837-38, and another in 1842. The last of these perhaps explains their appeal to the connexion. It reads:

The anniversary sermons in behalf of the Primitive Methodist Sunday Schools, Oldham, were preached on Sunday last by a boy of 14 years of age...Such was the excitement...that the congregation was admitted by tickets sold at 1s 6d.³³

As the unskilled could expect to earn no more than 10-15 shillings a week at that time the ticket price represented 10-15% of a week's wages; even at the present UK minimum wage, that equates to about £25-£40 today, an astonishing amount, and an interesting sidelight on how the people who were ready to patronise a PM event in Oldham at that time were both able and willing to spend their money.³⁴

Contemporaneous references to youthful preachers then disappear from all denominations after 1845 for almost two decades (with the notable exception of Charles Spurgeon, who had the sobriquet attached to him for several years, even though he was by then in his mid-20s), until three instances (two Methodist, neither PM, plus one Baptist) appeared in the 1860s. Most references, though, were to American examples, or American children touring Britain effectively as a novelty. The relish for boy preachers may well have declined because churches quickly came to recognise that this was more entertainment than worship, as demonstrated in the 1888 case of the 'Reverend' Paschal Porter, aged 11, who was a popular preacher in the United States.³⁵ On questioning he was found not to understand the words he had actually delivered, and it appeared that the child was an

³² *Morning Chronicle*, 29th September, 1845.

³³ *Bradford Observer*, etc., 10th November 1842. The earlier case was of a boy preacher from Kent named Jeffery who first appeared in an article in *Hull Packet*, 7th April 1837.

³⁴ The relative merits of methods of expressing the present value of past sums are considered in more detail in Chapter 9; the most common (RPI-based) is probably the least useful.

³⁵ *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, 31st August 1888; the article appeared widely in other journals too.

innocent dupe of whoever arranged the events. Whether or not the Prims recognised this risk as early as the 1840s must be debatable; yet the 1842 Oldham case was the last reference to a Prim boy-preacher, a year before the Wesleyan case above.

The pattern of articles dealing with female preaching is quite different from that of the boy-preachers; yet the two mesh well in the case of the Prims. Excluding incidental and foreign references, four cases of Temperance orators labelled 'preachers' but operating in secular venues, the marriage of a female itinerant, and one case of a female impersonator, the digitised sample contains accounts of 56 female preachers throughout the century, but only 19 of these date from before 1850. Primitive Methodists accounted for almost half (nine) of all reports up to 1850, but only one in six thereafter. The surprising aspect is the timing and nature of coverage. Early non-PM stories were generally hangovers from an eighteenth-century world in which there was more openness to female preaching: by contrast five of the PM instances were in a five-year period following the last PM boy-preacher story, and eight of the total concerned fund-raising events.³⁶ So by around 1840 the Prims were using both women and boy-preachers to tap the purses of followers, not to generate external publicity.

The post-1850 coverage confirms this. Not only did the detected instances decline, but the consistent theme was not the novelty but the high calibre of the women. The best example was that of Miss M C (Mary) Buck. Called to the ministry by Burland (Cheshire) circuit in 1836, she retired from itinerancy in 1846, but continued to preach for a quarter-century thereafter. She was much in demand for fund-raising and chapel-opening services, and was voted a pension of £20 pa by a grateful connexion in 1866. Dorothy Graham noted in

³⁶ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28th August 1818; *Examiner*, 25th April 1824; *Bristol Mercury*, 23rd May 1835; *Preston Chronicle*, 14th April 1840; *Blackburn Standard*, 9th December 1840; *Manchester Times*, 14th January, 1843; *Leeds Mercury*, 8th November 1845; *Hull Packet*, 15th October 1847; and *Preston Guardian*, 16th October and 17th June 1848.

her analysis of female itinerants that her parents were poor,³⁷ so it might appear that the pension staved off pauperism, yet in an account of 1870 her circumstances read rather differently. A contributor to a local newspaper, who admitted that his usual reports of dissenting worship were unfavourable, described her as follows:

Miss Buck is a lady of goodly proportions...above the average in...intellectual development...She wore a black silk dress, with a rich black velvet or satin mantle...set off with a white lace collar fastened with a small brooch composed of some precious stone set in gold...Altogether she had the appearance of a highly respectable lady, in a good position in life...³⁸

By this period, Mary bore little relationship to the earlier female PM preacher in terms of her celebrity status, but another case the preceding year was fairly similar.³⁹ By now, young women – and indeed young men – could no longer aspire to the pulpit simply on the basis of inspiration. It had become a job for the skilled and experienced, and women had to be at least a match, both oratorically and in scriptural knowledge, for their male counterparts.

The coverage suggests that the Prims' women preachers progressively, and from fairly early on, moved from external notoriety to dignified internal celebrity. By contrast, the Prims' competitors had made the opposite journey. Fifteen of the post-1850 cases were isolated or unspecified English congregations, six more such instances occurred in Scotland (including one woman who was prosecuted on three separate occasions for obstruction), and three more in Ireland; the Quakers, Plymouth Brethren, Baptists, Mormons and the Salvation Army each featured too, and by and large the pattern suggests that all had learned the PR lesson offered by the early Primitives. The Prims' legendary outcast status was alive and well – but only in the minds of its followers, and the switchover appears to have occurred before 1840.

³⁷ E Dorothy Graham, *Chosen by God: The Female Travelling Preachers of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, Bunbury, 1989 (WHS pamphlet publication).

³⁸ *Derby Mercury*, 25th May 1870.

³⁹ *Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 10th December 1869.

The coverage provides a particularly pointed perspective here. Women were banned from Wesleyan pulpits from 1803, with exceptions only for women such as Mary Taft and Mary Tooth, yet the press coverage exposes instances of uncelebrated Wesleyan women preachers at Diss in 1822, and Biggleswade in 1839.⁴⁰ The Prims trumpeted their embrace of untutored preachers, but coverage indicates that they were already restricted to a niche role fairly early. A wide rhetorical gap between the two strands of Methodism on this issue obscures the narrowness of the actual one. Wider press coverage offers a means of confirming this judgment; and since further spot-checks confirmed the impression that by mid-century the Primitive Methodists had been incorporated into the religious mainstream – by everyone except the Prims themselves – the further analyses were restricted to the period to 1850.

THEMES IN PRESS COVERAGE

Browsing exposed patterns of shifting editorial stances, judicial attitudes, and socio-political engagement. For example, the term ‘Ranter’ appeared in articles from the outset, but its incidence and character changed. A negative editorial stance was more likely when the epithet was used alone (seven of the 47 instances between 1818 and 1829 were derisive in tone or dismissive) than when it was absent or used in tandem (only one of 44 articles in the same period). It was one of nine indicators:

⁴⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, 30th December 1822; *Champion*, 20th October 1839.

Table 4.2

Period to	Dec '24	Dec '29	Dec '34	Dec '39	Dec '44	Dec '49
Sample size	37	54	60	203	61	62
Editorial stance						
-, dismissive tone	3%	7%	8%	3%	0%	0%
-, Ranter label only	62%	41%	40%	11%	0%	0%
+, use of Reverend	0%	50%	53%	51%	86%	87%
Courts stance						
-, hostile	14%	7%	2%	0%	0%	0%
+, supportive	0%	0%	7%	2%	2%	5%
Public image						
Camp Meetings	24%	22%	23%	2%	7%	0%
Political activity	0%	0%	0%	11%	41%	18%
Fund-raising	14%	7%	17%	17%	8%	18%
Charitable activity	3%	4%	3%	5%	2%	0%

Note 1: 'Sample size' relates to all categories except the use of the honorific 'reverend' where the numbers were considerably lower.

Note 2: All stories identified by searches through the BL Archive of digitised periodicals, 1818-1839, tranche one, are included, together with a one-in-five sample of stories from January 1840 to December 1849, in tranches one and two of the archive.

Although the broad drift is clear, the detailed shifts indicate some important nuances. First, while one might debate whether the legislative easements of 1828 had any practical significance for the Prims, they signal a changing zeitgeist. The fact and timing of the changing press stance, already treating the Prims in a more respectful manner before that date, indicates that they were not, despite their legends, regarded as more alien than other non-Anglican churches by that time. By contrast, the hostility of the courts appears to have switched to cautious support only in the wake of the Acts, and as the 1843 case highlighted in chapter 3 shows, this was true not just for the Prims. Nonetheless, it seems that the notorious Russell case of 1830 was against the tide of public and judicial attitudes by the mid-1820s, and suggests that the Prims, by continuing to concentrate on such exceptional cases, were responding to, and reinforcing, their adversity legends, not reflecting the dominant reality. Towards the later years of the decade, the surge in dismissive or derisive articles had passed, and it was accompanied by a further sharp

decline in the 'Ranter' epithet and the end of the camp-meeting as a newsworthy event. It was soon followed by a further rise in the 'Reverend' honorific, which accompanied the sudden, but temporary, emergence of political themes. In parallel with all of that, there was continuing coverage of chapel-building and charitable giving from the outset. It is hardly consistent with the notion that the Prims were seen as subversive, or fundamentally differentiated from the rest of Nonconformity.

The stories themselves can put more flesh on the bare bones of these statistics. There were only three found in 1818. Following an earlier article announcing the land purchase, there was a report of severe storm-damage to the partially-built Dead Lane Chapel, Loughborough; the third story reported the wedding of the first pair of husband-and-wife itinerants.⁴¹ Three years later, the press reported on two incarcerations, and in each case the tone adopted was strictly neutral. Waller's trial in particular was reported at length.⁴² The following year, the constable of Sowerby wrote to advise both of a camp-meeting and the beneficial effects of the Primitive Methodists, as follows

Since this body of zealous, God-fearing men, came into this country, much good has been done...Upwards of 600 have lately joined them in the parish of Halifax, and some very pleasing accounts are received from various other parts of Great Britain, where they are established.⁴³

This story was a plant by a recent convert to Primitive Methodism anxious to claim social credentials for his church; but again that fact confounds the image.

The same newspaper reported the longest sentence handed down to a Prim itinerant for unlawful street-preaching (Francis Jersey, Ulverston, 1823) in terms that suggested that the

⁴¹ *Examiner*, 8th February 1818 (Dead Lane chapel had capacity for 450 excluding any gallery accommodation); *Liverpool Mercury*, 13th March 1818; *Hull Packet*, 25th August 1818.

⁴² *Caledonian Mercury*, 18th June 1821; *Morning Chronicle*, 3rd August 1821.

⁴³ *Leeds Mercury*, 24th August 1822.

conviction and sentence were excessive.⁴⁴ That year, however, saw the first detected dismissive article – a derisive report of the preaching at a poorly-attended camp meeting near Sheffield, relayed from a local publication.⁴⁵ It followed hot on the heels of a report of a grand jury indictment in Rugeley, Staffordshire, for illegal assembly.⁴⁶ By the later years of the decade though, there were signs that not all Prims were on the margins of society: in 1828, a PM worshipper's home was burgled and promissory notes and currency to the value £502 was stolen – approximately 20 years' pay for a labourer; and the following year, a chapel was opened at Fritchley, Derbyshire 'with little debt remaining'.⁴⁷

The 1830s witnessed a series of changes. First, no doubt in response to the quickening tempo of political activity, cases of PM involvement in labour unrest emerged. Some, such as a 20-year old tailor and local preacher named Williams, sentenced to 14 years' transportation for sending threatening letters as part of ongoing Luddite disturbances in Herefordshire,⁴⁸ fitted the expected image, but an earlier case did not: a man named Saville was arrested in possession of Captain Swing material, but he was a radical businessman, not a penniless hothead. He was arrested in his gig, and the 60-year old was in possession of money and bills to the value of over £700.⁴⁹ Some of the activity was less inflammatory: Hepburn, an early miners' leader and PM local preacher, demanded that his negotiating adversary, Lord Londonderry, join him in prayer before entering discussions, in order to obtain divine guidance.⁵⁰ Yet this was not part of some long-run pattern of PM engagement with the left. Over the following years, newspaper coverage shows that the

⁴⁴ *Leeds Mercury*, 7th June 1823.

⁴⁵ *Examiner*, 26th October 1823, relayed from *Sheffield Mercury*.

⁴⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 25th October 1823.

⁴⁷ *Hull Packet and Humber Mercury*, 30th September 1828; and *Derby Mercury*, 9th December 1829. The chapel is described rather modestly, but a modern photograph suggests that it was not a cheap structure: see website containing local archive photographs of the village including the former chapel at: www.crichparish.co.uk/webpages/fritchleykeithclark.html (consulted 18th August 2011).

⁴⁸ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 15th January 1831.

⁴⁹ *Examiner*, 26th December 1830.

⁵⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, 18th May 1831, relayed from *Durham Chronicle*.

movement's stance was moral, not political, e.g., in its support for the anti-slavery movement (the PM petition submitted to parliament in 1833 was the first of at least half a dozen instances noted over the next five years) and their hostility to the Corn Laws and the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, one of their number standing unsuccessfully for the position of Clerk to the Driffield Poor Law Union.⁵¹

Their stance on the Corn Laws put them on the opposite side of the debate from Chartism, despite the common assertion of close links between the two. Accordingly press coverage of PM-Chartist links was scrutinised in rather more detail. The interesting fact to emerge from the Prims' reported involvement is how brief and narrow it was. Chapels were used for Chartist meetings, but it appears to have been a commercial arrangement. The hire of premises signalled an element of support, but it was limited both in extent and character. For example, while the chapel at Keighley was rented out for an evening Chartist meeting in 1838, the only Methodist speaker sharing the platform with Fergus O'Connor was the Wesleyan Joseph Rayner Stephens.⁵² The movement was never a firm supporter, even if some individuals were. Another key issue explaining the central distancing from Chartism was its developing anti-religious character, as evidenced by the its increasing competition with Sabbath worship. On a single day in 1842, there were reports of several instances of Chartist efforts to derail anti-Corn Law meetings, including one at Bladon where such a meeting was permitted by PM circuit authorities, whilst a Chartist one was not; and later that year, the Chartists held their own camp meeting in direct competition with a PM one at Rochdale – and attracted a larger audience.⁵³ The tempo of political and social engagement remained high until the early 1840s then fell sharply. The reason appears to have been twofold: first, the Chartist movement by that stage had acquired not only an

⁵¹ *Morning Chronicle*, 7th May 1833; *Hull Packet*, 21st October 1836.

⁵² *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, 4th August 1838.

⁵³ *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, 5th February 1842; *Preston Chronicle*, 30th July 1842.

Chapter 4: The Growth Era in Context

organisation but also a network of premises, and their anti-religious character became more pronounced, with a schedule of competing attractions timed to coincide with Sabbath devotions. The second is that there was a power vacuum at the heart of the Connexion until 1842/3, when the new generation took over.

The more ambivalent indicators are equally interesting. The movement that above all others was famed, internally and by later authorities, as the home of cottage religion first attracted notice as a chapel-builder and fund-raiser as early as 1818, and the subject accounted for about one-sixth of the articles written about the movement in four of the six five-year periods sampled: it was not a late-onset phenomenon. There was, too, an interesting shift in their Christian mission: whereas hardship relief was a common theme throughout, with one instance of Irish relief efforts in Hull in 1822, by the 1840s they exhibited growing interest in foreign mission, as might be expected of a movement driven by spiritual rather than temporal priorities.

SUMMARY

This chapter has set out the pattern of PM expansion across the nineteenth century. Following five years of broad stasis, it grew tenfold in the next five, and allowing for setbacks and spikes it experienced a progressively decreasing growth rate for the next four decades. Thereafter real growth had ended: numerical advances failed to keep pace with population increases, and did not reflect the declining hearer-member ratio. The numbers also signal that growth ended before gentrification, not vice-versa. Meanwhile the changing character of press coverage suggests that the Prims were never as vilified as their legends claim, and that hostility towards them ebbed away more quickly. The press

materials are only recently obtainable, but the numerical data have been in the public domain throughout the intervening years.

Yet the foregoing perspective has remained hidden, and it is difficult not to regard this as another consequence of the discourse: what was missing was not the data, but a preparedness to recognise and argue the case. In its absence, the Prims' own discourse-dominated account has been accepted, and so most writers have allowed too lengthy a 'heroic' phase and too belated a 'respectable' one. Respectability (as distinct from gentrification) arrived while the connexion was expanding rapidly, and the turning-inwards described as the denominational era followed, rather than foreshadowed, the onset of slowdown. Finally, however, there are unresolved questions about the shadowy years to 1819, and it is to these and other questions left unanswered by the preceding chapters that attention now turns.

Chapter 5: The Hidden Years and the Bourne-Clowes Rupture

This chapter seeks: to throw light upon the shadowy years between the movement's formation and the first Conference of 1820; to examine the Bourne-Clowes relationship breakdown; and to explore the exact nature of Hugh Bourne's authority in the movement. The three things are intimately connected; and each task is hindered by limited documentary evidence. The loss of Bourne's diaries from 1821 to late 1842 may be the largest, but the more damaging ones are those for 1805-1807 and 1814-1816. These were extant until at least 1855 when Walford wrote the first posthumous biography, and the gaps coincide with two key turning-points that shaped the later connexion, and which he, in common with every other writer, chose to deal with sketchily. Yet this process of selective legacy created lacunae that hint at the character of what was left out – or at least why it was omitted; and those lacunae can flesh out our understanding.

The issues arising from the 'shadowy years' are these. One: why did the 1807 Wesleyan Conference react with such rapidity and decisiveness to the camp-meeting threat? Two: given that the founding date of the movement remains, for some, contested territory, when did Bourne actually determine to found a competitor to Wesleyanism – assuming he in fact was the initiator? Three: given that the new movement emerged because of its commitment to noisy emotional expansionism, why was almost its first action to consolidate and rein in its emotionalism in favour of a more decorous style? All of the issues relating to these occurred before anyone other than Hugh Bourne put pen to paper; unsurprisingly, his explanations have dominated the subsequent account.

THE WESLEYAN CONFERENCE DECISION OF 1807

Most writers regard it as self-evident that the Conference proscription of camp-meetings was in response to Mow Cop, only seven weeks after the event. Two who have focused upon the decision, Ward, who saw it as part of the Wesleyan response to revivalism, and John Kent, for whom the tipping-point was the implicit demand for greater lay participation, nonetheless set out from the presumption that Bourne was the target, rather than examining whether that was so.¹ Such overt and rapid action was uncharacteristic of the Wesleyan body. It took four years to finally eject Kilham, and one of his key supporters, who nearly departed with him, was William Bramwell. He was a thorn in the Old Connexion's side for years, and following trouble in Leeds in 1802, he abandoned his circuit and headed for the Band-Room. Bunting wanted him removed, but Legal Hundred debated the matter at length, questioning him closely in 1803. Little of the discussion was recorded, and most of that was reserved to the Conference Journal: only his anodyne agreement to conform appeared in the public minutes.² These serious threats to the movement took years to mature, and Conference was remarkably unwilling to act decisively by ejecting the troublemakers; here, we are to believe that the matter was raised, decided and settled in seven weeks, and occasioned no debate that required confidential recording in the Journal, because it and the minutes are the same. The wording of the two questions-and-answers is interesting, and is substantially reproduced here:

Q(20): What is the judgement of this conference concerning what are called Camp Meetings?

A: It is our judgement that even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief...

¹ Ward, *Religion and Society*, pp. 76-82; John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism*, London, 1978, p. 59.

² The Minutes or Journals of the People Called Methodists, volume the 1st, MARC: 1803 Conference, Manchester, f. 241

Q(21): Have our people been sufficiently cautious respecting the permission of strangers to preach to our congregations?

A: We fear not, and we therefore again direct that no stranger from America or elsewhere be suffered to preach...³

The word 'again' suggests that an earlier ruling was being cited as a precedent (although these were more usually enacted by citation of Conference date and decision number); yet a check of decisions made between 1802 (camp-meetings began to attract attention via *The Arminian Magazine* only in 1801/2) and 1807 uncovered no earlier reference to this or any loosely allied issue.⁴ So the repetition of 'America' in both answers, their juxtaposition, and the use of 'again' together point to a common purpose: vetoing informal pulpits at which unwelcome preaching might occur under a Wesleyan banner; and excluding unwelcome preachers from Wesleyan chapels. Bourne was never listed as a local Wesleyan preacher, although he had the status of a local official and thus was no 'stranger': the man in their sights was Lorenzo Dow.

The problem here was not outdoor revivalism, but the rest of what Dow preached: republicanism and congregational independence. This was realpolitik directed, not *against* some obscure official in North Staffordshire, but *towards* persuading the government that Methodists hated Dow more than it did. The Burslem situation was very different, because Bourne's local initiative preached neither dangerous doctrine and did no more than Wesleyan field-preaching had done for decades (and continued unhindered in Cornwall); it was a threat only to the extent that it exploited Dow's label for publicity purposes – publicity that was very unwelcome to Wesleyanism at this point. It seems very unlikely that the circuit superintendent, appointed only recently on merit to the Legal Hundred, would have been prepared to appear at an event 'productive of considerable mischief' if

³ Ibid., 1807 Conference Questions XX, XXI.

⁴ Conference Journals, 1802-7 inclusive.

the mere fact of open-air revivalism was the threat here;⁵ it is equally improbable that his two immediate successors (one of whom, Edmondson, would go on to be a President of Conference in 1818) would go to the lengths they did to return Bourne to the fold if he was flouting Conference wishes on an increasing scale every year.⁶ The successive superintendents acted as they did because they knew that Dow, not Bourne, was the real target. One further hint that this was a piece of short-term pragmatism is that during Edmondson's presidency, Dow was allowed to preach in a Wesleyan chapel in order to raise funds for Tunstall's Primitive Methodist Sunday-School.⁷

BOURNE'S DECISION TIMETABLE

The decision to form a separate denomination did not flow from Bourne's unchurching, and his public position here is apparently inconsistent: he advanced founding dates and events from as early as Christmas Day 1800 to the formation of the Stanley class in 1810, and others such as 31st May 1807 and the first post-ejection camp-meeting on Mow Cop in 1808; five different claims appear in the A Text alone;⁸ and they are contradicted by Journal entries.⁹ Nor is it likely that this is because the autobiographies (of which three versions were begun) were mere jottings or musings: see Appendix. The last of these claims, that the separation of the Stanley class marked the first Primitive Methodist congregation, was authoritatively dismissed by Kendall.¹⁰ Events of the preceding year are also telling. The class-leader at Norton, who later led the Stanley class that seceded in 1810, invited Bourne to rejoin the Wesleyans as a class-member on 12th March 1809. He

⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶ David Waller (ed.), *An Alphabetical Arrangement of All the Wesleyan Methodist Ministers...Eighteenth Edition*, London, 1896, p. xxxiii.

⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 60, 312-3.

⁸ Bourne A text, ff. 133, 228, 242, 248, and 252; also for example B Text, pp. 76, 79.

⁹ Bourne Journals, E f. 5, E f. 291, among numerous possible instances.

¹⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 115.

did not decline on the grounds that he was committed to another denomination, but because he could not fulfil his class obligations.¹¹ Nor was this a covert way of saying the same thing, because the Norton incident was part of an established pattern: a string of diary entries in 1808-9 show Bourne as a continuing attender at Wesleyan worship – and a tolerated activist within it.¹² An entry in his diary is surely conclusive: almost five months after the as yet unnamed Primitive Methodists united, he wrote as follows on 12th October 1811: ‘it was very much against my will at first to have a separate society’.¹³ The evidence shows that Bourne, until 1811, only wanted to be free of Wesleyan discipline in order to mission as he pleased, and believed that the Old Connexion would come to see that he was right; he did not yet have the ambition to form a separate movement. By the same token, the Wesleyans, until 1811 and beyond, did not want to eject a nuisance, but to discipline an awkward but potentially valuable group of members and activists. Each was waiting for the other to fall into line, and both would be disappointed. In unwilling retirement though, contemplating the changes being wrought to what he saw as his creation, Bourne needed to antedate the separation decision to a time that gave him exclusive credit for its founding. For him perhaps the myriad claims were not conflicting, but cumulative, evidence. Each one dated the birth of the movement while Steele or Clowes were still Wesleyans, and so excluded from founder status.

THE TUNSTALL NON-MISSION LAW ERA

The ironic label refers to the period up to 1819 when Tunstall circuit was opposed to expansion. It describes not one policy, but two: geographic consolidation; and a shift from praying to preaching, together with a preaching style moving from emotional and

¹¹ Bourne Journals, E f. 5.

¹² Bourne's Journals contain 13 instances of Bourne and Clowes operating in tandem between 3rd September 1808 and 14th February 1809, at a rate of once per week during the closing five weeks of this period.

¹³ Bourne Journals, F f. 172.

extempore to planned and polished. The absence of records has allowed this duality to be obscured, and for the two to be conflated; but although linked they were distinct. Consolidation was a piece of resource-dictated pragmatism, drawing breath while more preacher recruits could be found. In the absence of direct evidence, this is held to have dated from 1814; yet the problem of preacher shortage had bitten much earlier. The March 1812 plan had 23 preacher slots (only 21 named, and no recorded women, the usual explanation of a blank) but 34 places to service;¹⁴ it was about to lose first a salaried itinerant by dismissal, and second a local preacher by death.¹⁵ As later plans show (and common sense dictates), the movement needed as a minimum parity between preacher numbers and outlets – and preferably a surplus of the former for flexibility. The recruitment drive occasioned by this brought in ex-Wesleyans who favoured a more decorous style; and they were increasingly able to dictate such matters from 1812 to 1819.

At least one writer placed responsibility for the policy on Clowes.¹⁶ Yet Clowes was not a committee-man and he could call on few close allies; furthermore he was a loyalist who deferred consistently to James Steele.¹⁷ Although only five years older than Bourne, he was 13 years older than Clowes, and had been a senior figure in the local Wesleyan laity before 1805. His appointment as the inaugural leader reinforces the chronology to emphasise his authority. When Bourne was ejected, the Harriseahead miners did not follow him into the wilderness; when Clowes suffered the same fate, his congregation decamped too, yet there was no generalised coming-together; but within two months of Steele's removal, the connexion came into being, complete with preaching-plan, class tickets and circuit machinery, with him in charge, and Clowes as the second remunerated

¹⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 134

¹⁵ Crawford sacked; Walford, *Life*, i, p. 390 notes the death of Thomas Cotton in 1813.

¹⁶ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p. 31.

¹⁷ He remained 'Mr Steele', not 'Brother Steele', in Clowes, *Journals*, p. 22 and passim thereafter.

itinerant. Clowes was unlikely to have opposed Steele decisions; and he was as yet in no position to have initiated many of his own.

The change of preaching style is more problematic, although again it is hard to see the merit of claiming this as Clowes' work. He was a man committed to emotional preaching, but also to house-to-house evangelism and fervent prayer: he had neither the clout nor the relish to champion dignified preaching. If the decision was as clear-cut as Walford claims (and there are no extant records to illuminate the question) it is hard to see how it was accepted unless both Steele and Bourne concurred. The former was the acknowledged leader; the latter had significant allies both around Tunstall and among the Ramsor farmers. Yet Walford claims that Bourne did indeed oppose it not only in 1814, but later too, at the time of the Mercaston camp-meeting of 1816.¹⁸ It beggars belief that the man who in 1808 walked away from the Wesleyans merely over the name of his initiative – as evidenced by his dealings with Riles – would have so readily abandoned principled opposition to decorous preaching.

There is however one more direct test of Bourne's stance. His diaries, despite lost years, provide a series of reactions to Tunstall Quarter-day meetings from 1814, Walford's claimed date of his opposition. Entries for April and July 1814 read as 'a good time' and an occasion when 'we...settled things pretty well'.¹⁹ The diaries for the entire period from there to the Mercaston camp-meeting are missing. When they restart, and continue in an unbroken sequence to the point of his nervous breakdown in January 1819, there is a resumption of the previous equanimity with events in Tunstall. The first quarter-day after Mercaston saw no sparks fly over the decorum-revivalism issue: it was 'pleasant', and the

¹⁸ Walford, *Life*, i, p. 405 (NB page refs go awry here; this is the second page so numbered.)

¹⁹ Bourne Journals, G ff. 13 and 46. Although now missing, the original was extant in 1952: Wilkinson (*Bourne*, p. 99) quoted the latter entry in another context.

following nine were respectively (each being quotations): a good day, (no comment); a good time; a good time; a lovely time; a great deal of business; (no comment); a good time; and a deal of business.²⁰

Walford, it should be remembered, is not an authoritative witness here. He was not yet 15 when these events began, so had to rely upon Bourne's retrospective claims. Decorum was hardly in evidence as late as June 1814, which would see another Ramsor camp-meeting, by now a regular event, attended by no fewer than 19 preachers including Bourne and Clowes.²¹ Preacher shortage, though, had led to the arrival of ex-Wesleyan preachers. It was they who brought a new more polished style, and a preference for preaching over praying. Steele was likely to be broadly in sympathy with his former colleagues, and Bourne may well either have felt indebted to them (they sided with him against Crawford) or may not even have recognised the problem until too late. Variety was one of his key principles, and the de facto change may have occurred without his realising it at first. It may be that Bourne's appointment as General Superintendent of the Connexion in 1814 kept him on the road much of the time, unaware of what was happening.²² Clowes, meanwhile, was part of the revival from around 1816 anyway; so it is hard to see him as an advocate of decorum then either.

A further interesting contrast applies between Bourne's attitude to Tunstall and the East Midlands, where his worries about Nottingham (by now successor to Derby) were clear. It may have been starting to add numbers much faster than Tunstall, but the administration was a shambles. He had to record that one Nottingham circuit official identified only by

²⁰ Bourne Journals, H f. 15, 24, 31; I f. 8, 17; J f. 23, 56, 77, 103; K f. 14.

²¹ Bourne Journals, 5th June 1814, G f. 31

²² Walford, *Life*, i, p. 405.

initials as JW had embezzled funds at the time of the September 1818 meeting there.²³ So long as Tunstall was adding members faster than Benton's mission, Bourne was content; and even when it was not, Bourne's focus was on Nottingham's problems, not its successes. What nobody realised though was that Tunstall had been growing thanks to attention to transitions two and three of Currie's model; transition one had withered but the impact of that would only show up from about 1817. The East Midlands, by contrast, was growing *despite* the pastoral failures: the huge success in the first transition was producing recruits willy-nilly. When Benton was forced to stand down in May 1818, the pastoral problems were remedied; the East Midlands boomed; but Tunstall, having exhausted its reservoir of potential recruits from earlier revivalism, remained static. After a committee of inquiry sat around Christmas 1818, Bourne may have thought that he had been outflanked by the smooth operators in Tunstall, allowing them to neuter what he saw as his creation. He had been focused on the minor problems of the revivalists, while the decorous were ruining Tunstall. Breakdown ensued.

This interpretation may be arguable, but Bourne's retrospective version is surely wrong. The extant diaries tell a story of him worried not about the pro-decorum wing of the movement, but the improvidence of the revivalists. The alternative, of believing that Bourne's anguish at consolidation coincided with the missing period of the diaries, and miraculously was assuaged only a few days after the Mercaston event which summed the problems up for him (and despite the fact that decorum continued to rule for another two years or more), is not credible; the lacuna in the evidence is simply too convenient. So Bourne did not oppose the consolidation policy, but he either went along with, or simply failed to recognise, the decorous style that was imported along with the new recruits. Two things held the movement back until late 1818: decorum in Tunstall and pastoral failure in

²³ Bourne Journals, J f. 101-2.

the East Midlands. Curing the second problem exposed the scale of the first. Yet if Bourne invented the revivalist formula for success, it was others who applied it in Tunstall; and they did so persuaded, not by the absent Bourne, but by the results. Bourne lacked the skills or the authority to persuade them otherwise. However genuine his eventual opposition to the policies in place, it seems that his initial stance was one of support. If so, it was given on the basis that he misunderstood what he was supporting: prudence versus profligacy, whereas it was actually decorum versus expansive revivalism; and if so, he cannot have enjoyed realising his error. Bourne recovered as the numbers improved, and he was now convinced firstly that he had been right all along, secondly that he had no intention of being made to look foolish, and thirdly that he had to get his version on the record. It was the trigger for the rupture between him and Clowes.

The baneful consequence, for later historians, is that the movement's understandable desire not to broadcast these things was carried into effect only too well. The sanitised version of Bourne's account, plus Clowes' autobiography, sat comfortably within the discourse that by now was general across the connexion, and John Petty set the seal on things by issuing a history that beatified both men. The selective destruction of Bourne's manuscripts was good enough to conceal the reality, because what was left was unreadably turgid – and usually unread.

BOURNE-CLOWES RELATIONSHIP

The relationship breakdown here has generally been ignored or downplayed.²⁴ All three knew the contents of the surviving diaries and autobiographies, though, and they offer little support for such readings. Before 1819, there is no recorded attempt to see the movement

²⁴ Petty, *History*, p. 428; Kendall, ii, pp. 360-65; Wilkinson, *Bourne*, pp. 145, 171-73.

as Bourne's or Clowes' creation; the first such sign – this, in a movement, it will be recalled, led by the senior preaching figure of Steele, and being projected forward by new blood in the East Midlands – was the Clowes portrait on the 1819 minutes. He was by then the undisputed star of the movement: its most charismatic preacher, and the man who had single-handedly turned Hull into the connexion's engine for growth. Bourne, the indifferent pulpit performer, was just recovering from a nervous breakdown, and given the task of producing a 'history' of the origins of the movement, to be published in sections in the connexional magazine. It in essence claimed that the movement was the work of two men: Hugh and James Bourne. Clowes was outraged and wrote in protest to the Tunstall circuit authorities. Although Clowes does not refer to this in his autobiography, Bourne's Journal for Friday 17th March 1820 reads:

...was at Committee. A letter was presented from W. Clowes about the history of the origin but it was rejected on account of falsehood and misrepresentation.

Clowes repeated his complaint to the June 1820 quarterly meeting in Tunstall, but the matter was left unresolved: Bourne and his brother plus their allies could vote down his claims.²⁵ Clowes maintained his silence thereafter, although he did record the fact of his disagreement, and this was cited by Kendall in the opening paragraph of his work.²⁶ For Bourne, this was his creation, and he intended the world to know that: the fact that James Steele was actually the leader was irrelevant. The *History* featured instead the image of Bourne alone. It mentions, but not in any prominent manner, Clowes' role, perhaps because by now the latter's star status was unwelcome.

Previously, Bourne's Journals consistently showed that William Clowes was a man much admired by Bourne; and while we have no contemporaneous writings, Clowes can be assumed to have returned the compliment. He thought Bourne rather odd in his habits, but

²⁵ Bourne Journals L ff. 52 and 62: 17th March and 2nd June 1820.

²⁶ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 1 quotes: 'I did not approve of its being drawn up in the way it was.'

admirable in his piety and diligence in the cause of his faith.²⁷ It would be wearisome to cite every entry listed about Clowes but as late as May 1813 a diary entry reads: ‘...saw William Clowes. I rejoiced in heart to see him’; on Thursday 7th July 1814, Clowes stayed at the family farmhouse (he would do so again later that year) after worship together at Norton described as ‘a great time’.²⁸ There is no sense in the 1808 diaries of any bitterness that Clowes desisted from camp-meetings under pressure from the Wesleyans; indeed Kendall’s reading of the evidence (in which the present writer concurs) is that at the time, Bourne fully understood the delicacy of Clowes’ situation. That was the position in relation to Edward McEvoy, an early PM activist who also temporarily abandoned Bourne, turning up to the second camp-meeting to tell him that none of the Wesleyans would attend. By not later than 1811, the two were once again on good terms.²⁹

That is not to say that there were no tensions between the shy but ambitious Bourne and the younger extrovert Clowes. One occasion prior to 1814 which hints at tensions was in 1811, when on Friday 25th January, Bourne confided in the diary as follows:

I have been convinced that I am not altogether in the will of God, for while I am with old James [Crawford] and Clowes, I am generally excluded from acting in publick (sic) and instructing. I have yielded up to them, thinking that they knew better than me. But this appears to be not altogether right. I believe that the work would spread more if we laboured separate. But then I have been tempted with a fear of getting up into self and of my own ignorance.

There followed an entry dated 5th February, reporting a “painful exercise between Clowes and me.” There is then heavy deletion of the manuscript. Overall though, the pattern in Bourne’s contemporaneous writings up to 1818 is one of overwhelming admiration and affection, coupled with a sense of inadequacy compared with these charismatic figures.

²⁷ Clowes, *Journals*, pp. 37-38.

²⁸ Bourne Journals, F f. 299, and G f. 46.

²⁹ Although there are no extant diaries for this claimed exchange between the two men, it is notable that McEvoy features not too long thereafter in one of the dream revelations as a favoured preacher figure – 2nd June 1811 – a sure sign of Bourne’s favour. The sequence of such reports cited elsewhere also, incidentally, consistently showed Clowes more favoured than Bourne himself.

The 1820 Conference endorsed the contents of the *History* but also decided that printing work would be undertaken by James Bourne at Bemersley, rather than at Hull. Over the next two decades, he held a monopoly over connexional output, and since John Flesher would discover, when he took over from Bourne, that Bemersley's prices were double the going rate in London, it made little money for the connexion. This was not much helped by the practice by circuits of tardy settlement of accounts; Hull was a particularly pronounced laggard, owing in excess of £600 by 1824. Clowes was spending the money on additional preachers instead. He was surrounded by prosperous business-people though and so this is unlikely to have been a maverick act by Clowes: this was Hull policy, even if never admitted as such. The circuit had faced funding issues from the start because of its readiness to take on additional preachers (a further implicit denial that Clowes was in the consolidator-decorous camp), and had implemented a regime in which preachers' remuneration was limited to the circuit's capacity to pay; so not paying Bemersley was attractive.

Hugh, the man-in-the-middle between his brother James who wanted the money, and Clowes who as front-man for Hull did not want to remit it, was still upset about his version of the movement's origins being repudiated by the popular Clowes. Tensions continued to grow – and Hull's debts to the book-room went down very slowly – until they erupted at the 1833 Conference. In an extraordinary three-hour diatribe, Bourne – a man famed for attachment to brevity in preaching – accused Clowes of a litany of offences including causing the death of a preacher in 1819 by overwork.³⁰ Conference was not impressed, and so Bourne then published a tract – although unsigned it was clearly his work – that sought to prove that Hull and its daughters might be popular, but it was Tunstall and its

³⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p 360. The Samuel Simcock myth, and Bourne's views on over-lengthy preaching: *Ibid.*, i, pp. 118 and 197.

offspring that produced the recruits.³¹ The numbers did not bear examination, but that did not stop Bourne peddling the message whenever he could. At least one future Conference President was unimpressed.³² Later writers have disingenuously tried to play this down and to distance Bourne from it; but this was nothing less than Bourne's attempt to destroy Clowes' reputation, and contemporaries understood that only too well.³³ They gradually concluded that Bourne must retire, and the precise process by which that was carried out is considered in the context of gauging his true authority. At this point, though, it is appropriate to consider a different reading of the evidence.

THE WOOLLEY THESIS

A recent article on Bourne and Clowes set out from the premise that religious movements rapidly evolve a single and uncontested 'constitutive narrative': in this case that the Prims, unusually, had these two men as joint founders. In consequence, those who wrote later within a denominational tradition did so in accordance with that narrative. They explained the deterioration in relations – which they dealt with only sketchily if at all – as a product of Bourne's mental travails. Tim Woolley, however, argued that irrespective of Bourne's later mental state, there was evidence of a theological gulf between the two men as early as 1805, the year of Clowes' conversion, discernible in their differing views of the Wesleyan itinerant and opponent of emotional revivalism, William Miller, who was assigned to the Burslem circuit that year. For Woolley, Clowes was hostile to the principle of the camp-meeting but temporarily enthused by Dow and others in early 1807, and so the usual view of him as a stalwart of open-air evangelism owes more to the dominant narrative than the

³¹ Anon, *A Few Plain Facts: Faith and Industry Superior to High Popularity*, Bemersley, 1833, referred to in Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p 361.

³² William Lister, at a District meeting in Sunderland in 1835; cited in Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p 362.

³³ Petty ignored both the 1833 Conference events and the subsequent publication, as did each of Bourne's biographers; the exceptions are Kendall, as cited, who admits, incidentally, that this was not the most offensive episode, and Wilkinson, *Bourne*, pp. 145, 171-3 who noted three clashes forgiving two as a sad misunderstanding and this occasion, as Kendall, as a product of advancing years.

evidence. He reasoned that Bourne did not initially realise the transitory nature of Clowes' attachment to the camp-meeting, but as this progressively became plainer, so his writings became more trenchant: laudatory diaries written around 1808-14, the more neutral 1823 *History*, and the progressively embittered autobiographies written from 1844. For him, that is why the autobiographies attracted so little attention: they cut across the narrative.

There are however reasons to dispute each of the steps in the argument. First, while there are no 1805-1806 diaries extant, it seems unlikely that Bourne harboured resentment about Miller's influence over Clowes, even during the period that Clowes was refusing to attend camp-meetings. Bourne was not someone who forgave and forgot easily as his dealings with Goodwin, Mountford and Crawford demonstrate. It is therefore remarkable that he was prepared to assist Clowes to pen a letter to Miller more or less half-way through the time when Clowes was an absentee. He later *wrote* that he felt abandoned by Clowes; his contemporary actions suggest that he did not.

Second, the argument that the autobiographies were marginalised because of the dominant 'constitutive narrative' does not stand up. If Kendall's *History* is taken as the most representative secondary account, it does indeed appear to indicate a desire to relegate them as a source: there is no direct acknowledgement of them in its first six chapters which deal with the founding era, while there are plenty that openly refer to the diaries. Yet there are many more instances of quotations lacking attribution, and other characterisations of a looser sort, and these prove on inspection to be respectively exact and broad repetitions of autobiographical text. Of a score or more of word-for-word instances, three are so distinctive as to allow no other interpretation. The first two occur on the same page (along with two others) and read that Bourne was 'fitted to be a public praying labourer', while the 'people got to be, in great measure, Israelitish'; and on variety in religious exercises,

Kendall later notes that 'it was...like Judges xxi. 25. Every man did that which was right'.³⁴ Three looser characterisations are Kendall's description of Miller, the Wesleyan itinerant; his account of Bourne's exclusion; and Bourne's subsequent exchanges with Riles, the circuit superintendent.³⁵ In the last of these, the alteration of a single word has however subtly altered the sense: Kendall states that Bourne's sin was to 'to set up other than the ordinary worship'; Bourne's version refers to setting up other places. Kendall, in other words, has broadened the accusation to suggest that it was the forbidden *form* of worship, not merely unauthorised expansion; and this has led to at least one later writer following the Kendall version, not the substantive original meaning.³⁶ Kendall, in short, was keen to use the source, but not to advertise it. The most reasonable explanation is that he regarded it as reliable in all respects except for its Clowes references, and handled it accordingly, consciously avoiding calling too much attention to it.

Finally, and perhaps most conclusively, the key reason not to accept the Woolley thesis is that the Prims took a very long time to arrive at a 'creation narrative' embodied in identifiable leadership figures. A movement that lasted only 121 years was engaged in discreet dispute about it for virtually the entire time. Bourne attempted to claim the role as early as 1819 in his 'history' but the featuring of an image of Clowes on that year's preparatory minutes does not suggest that the Nottingham activists who called and hosted the meeting agreed. And of course the man who occupied the chief offices of the movement from 1811 to 1827 was neither Bourne nor Clowes: it was James Steele. The guerrilla war between the two men lasted for the remainder of their lives, and both attracted supporters. The deaths of the two men produced posthumous biographies by

³⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 31 and 120; the word-for-word sources for these are Bourne, *A Text*, ff. 75, 105 and 165 respectively.

³⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 57 and 84-86; these reflect largely the wording of respectively *A Text*, ff. 247-9 and *B Text* pp. 61-63.

³⁶ Currie, *Methodism Divided*, p. 57.

family members (Davison, 1854, and Walford, 1855-6) but a resolution of the 1854 Conference required that Walford give an undertaking not to revive the disagreements. A draft of at least part of his undertaking is written on the reverse of one of the autobiography texts. It reads:

In answer to the Resolutions passed by the Conference and Dated Manchester 19th June 1854, we beg to assure the [Book] Committee that we shall in the Biography of Hugh Bourne studiously avoid giving offence to any much more [ends indeterminately]⁴³

The connexional goal is shown clearly enough in Petty's 1860 *History*. It featured images of both men – but not James Steele. Yet the claims of the two camps did not drain away immediately. Further laudatory biographies of both men appeared over the following three decades, with clear 'Bourne' and 'Clowes' camps, as betrayed in the titles of the Jesse Ashworth and William Garner works in particular.⁴⁴ The heat had largely gone out of the personality question, but not the founding process, by the Edwardian era. It is telling that the 'centenary' spanned a four-year period. But at least the Bourne-Clowes question was settled: in a work celebrating and recording the centenary era, the Revd Thompson echoed Kendall's clear view that this was a movement sprung from twin founders.⁴⁵

So the 'creation narrative' may have been firmly in place in 1912, but it was contested ground for most of the preceding century; and its legacy continues to this day. The iconic events in Primitive Methodism since 1932 have been the 1957 and 2007 commemorative Camp-Meetings on Mow Cop, and Woolley himself clearly states that the movement existed for 125 years – i.e., from 1807, not 1811.⁴⁶ For this writer, at least, the evidence speaks of a more personal rupture and a connexion that was unable to fully contain the

⁴³ Written inverted on the reverse of the final folio (numbered 315) of Bourne, A Text, f.316. Unsigned but by date and context the work of John Walford.

⁴⁴ William Garner, *The Life of the Rev. and Venerable William Clowes, One of the Patriarchs of The Primitive Methodist Connexion*, 2nd Edition, London, 1868; Jesse Ashworth, *The Life of the Venerable Hugh Bourne, Founder of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, London, 1888

⁴⁵ J. Day Thompson, *The Church That Found Herself*, London, 1912, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Woolley, 'Selective Memory', p. 67.

problem. The culture of silence that this infighting produced remained in force until the 1950s, when Wilkinson described (but did not detail) events as a sad misunderstanding between two elderly men. It might be fair enough in relation to 1849, but it was not a reasonable defence to the 1833 attacks. His stance – seeking to find as little fault as possible in either man, and trying to share the minimal blame between them – is generally echoed elsewhere by those who have investigated;⁴⁷ while in a later PWS article already cited, the author was apparently unfamiliar with the entries in the Bourne diaries that refer to the 1820 episode or earlier complimentary references.⁴⁸ Brown tried to suggest that Bourne's problem was that his language was sometimes intemperate, but that he in reflective mood was still a Clowes admirer, so much of the invective should be discounted;⁴⁹ and he tried to hint that Clowes was mildly to blame in the matter of book-room funds. Viewed in the round, neither argument is persuasive. Clowes' tardiness over book-room remittances was not for personal gain and from his point of view if he used the money for preachers, this was better than allowing it to end up in the pockets of James Bourne and John Hancock; his remarkable forbearance in the 1840s, wishing only to clear his name, and content not to interfere in the remedying of Bourne's finances, are much to his credit. By contrast, Bourne was a clever but simple and unworldly man who loved and trusted his brother; but he also exhibited a streak of vindictiveness that must have dismayed even his admirers. Unsurprisingly, Bourne's final ten years were unhappy and his querulous pursuit of enemies, real or imaginary, distasteful; yet the connexion responded with kindness and restraint until it really had no choice but to act, and when it did so nonetheless did the minimum it could to salve Clowes without damaging Bourne, who thus emerged as first among equals.

⁴⁷ E.g., Stephen Hatcher devotes a considerable space in his thesis to the issue.

⁴⁸ Brown, 'Hugh Bourne, a Bicentenary Reflection', p. 121ff.

⁴⁹ And, implicitly, Brown and Woolley cannot both be right.

THE NATURE OF BOURNE'S AUTHORITY

One consequence has been that Bourne's authority has been misunderstood to some extent. He had resigned his connexional offices while unwell, but resumed later in 1819, but neither he nor Clowes could claim outstanding status over the next year or two, as evidenced by their treatment at the first two conferences. Bourne then embarked upon a process of cornering the connexional machinery, and that can be traced in the bureaucratic niceties of the movement's early years. These are a resource perhaps bypassed by connexional writers and social historians alike; yet the dull records portray fascinating power-shifts. During a sixteen year period from 1821 to 1837, Bourne managed to ensure that he was represented, and so far as possible had a majority of supporters able to vote his way, on the key constituent bodies.⁵⁰

The 1821 Conference appointed a General Committee (GC) to attend to connexional matters, comprising one nominee from each of the circuits then in being, plus a book-room committee (BRC) to control and manage the movement's publications. The GC lasted only one year in its inaugural form, but to understand its changing character it is necessary first to consider the more stable BRC, which first comprised James Steele as chairman, James Bourne, Hugh Bourne, Charles Abraham and John Hancock. The composition of the BRC was unchanged until Steele's death in 1827. He was replaced by his son, plus John Andrew, a Congleton businessman, but the chairmanship passed to Hugh Bourne. Andrew and Steele departed within a year (both would later exit from the connexion) and Abraham also stepped down, to be replaced by Clowes.⁵¹ Clowes however was

⁵⁰ Unless otherwise indicated by reference to the more detailed holographic journals, the following paragraphs summarise the relevant entries in consolidated printed minutes of PM Conferences, 1821-1849 inclusive: WHS library, Oxford Brookes, shelfmark WHS 287.0064

⁵¹ One might speculate about how much of Steele Jnr's decision to leave was a reaction to the magazine coverage of his father's role in the movement: see Chapter 3.

outnumbered by the three Tunstall men and his Hull base, plus ceaseless travels, left him little opportunity to challenge the conduct of affairs at Bemersley, although Nixon doubtless kept him informed.⁵²

The GC, meanwhile, was reconstituted in 1822 as the members of the BRC plus the Hull GC, which comprised seven people but not William Clowes; Steele again chaired it. Although outgunned during meetings, Tunstall had a key advantage in that correspondence was directed to James Bourne at Bemersley. In 1823, Hull's GC was reduced to six, but turnover meant that Clowes appeared on this most senior body for the first time. Tunstall was now represented by its GC, which comprised an unchanged BRC plus two other names establishing numerical parity, and effective dominance, for the home circuit. Clowes disappeared between 1824 and 1827, and in 1829 a subtle change occurred: correspondence was to be directed to John Hancock, not James Bourne. As a Bourne ally though, it was more about advancing him than weakening the Bournes, and by now Hugh held the chairs of both committees and his brother was connexional publisher, printer, and treasurer. This probably marked the zenith of the Bournes' power, but since the GC had little operational control over the Districts, that power was severely circumscribed. From then until 1836, there were minor fluctuations, with the arrival of men such as John Walford, Thomas Batty, John Hallam and David Paisley, who became 'Assistant Corresponding Member', or assistant Secretary.⁵³ The last three named were all itinerants, but neither Walford nor Paisley was a long-term fixture. So throughout this period, Bourne controlled the connexional machinery; but it did not control the connexion. That fell to Conference, membership of which was determined by the Districts, and comprised one

⁵² James Nixon was a founder-member who officiated at the first two camp-meetings and was a recognised CMM preacher; yet he was by inclination a Clowes ally, and was later hostile to the Bournes.

⁵³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 344-5.

itinerant to every two laymen – all of whom however were long-standing officials and nearly always lay preachers as well.

Things changed suddenly the following year. By now, the BRC comprised Batty, the Bournes, Hallam and Hancock. Bourne's grip of the book-room looked even tighter, but it was not, because the 1837 GC was made up of these five plus Clowes and Nixon, but significantly it also included the two Garner brothers and John Flesher (and, it will be noted, thus comprised six itinerants and only four laymen). It was the beginning of the end for Bemersley. That same year, Bourne even tried to censure Clowes for allowing Flesher to be a delegate despite his wearing a forbidden form of apparel – a double-breasted coat. The charge was thrown out.⁵⁴ To the new men, Bourne was the flawed genius, widely admired but not much liked;⁵⁵ Clowes, the worn-out pulpit star and reluctant bureaucrat, was by contrast much loved. It was clear after the mid-1830s that Bourne's increasing fixation on writing his place in history was damaging, and that he and Clowes could no longer operate together even separated by a hundred-plus mile distance over the Pennines. A bloodless palace coup, perhaps inspired as early as 1833, had begun.

In 1838, John Flesher was appointed to deputise as book-room editor, which following the previous year's unsuccessful verbal assault must have been a bitter pill for Bourne. His brother James continued to act as connexional printer but ceased to be the book-room steward; that role fell to Hallam.⁵⁶ Conference would now exercise direct oversight of

⁵⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 470.

⁵⁵ On view, for example, in Petty, *History*, pp. 426-8: 'the decline of Mr Bourne's mental and physical powers...required relief'; and his 'regulations...in some cases bore hardly upon [itinerants and this was] an example of partial legislation, which a later Conference saw proper to abolish'. The desire to downplay or deny the rifts between the two men are equally plain in this passage: 'in moments of severe trial, Mr Bourne spoke of Mr Clowes in unwarrantable terms, for which...he had the manliness...to express his deep regret'; it is difficult to reconcile this with the fact of the 1842, 1847 and 1849 Journals cited elsewhere.

⁵⁶ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 7 records the date of Hallam's accession to the role as 1843; but he appears as the designated steward in the minutes for the Darlaston Conference of 1838, and this is repeated in the holographic Journal, f. 194, decision 38.

book-room operations because Hallam, together with Clowes, was charged with making stock control transparent to the connexion and to report their satisfaction with the arrangements. Meanwhile the GC lost control of Conference business. A drafting committee (later renamed the Preparatory Committee) was formed, and significantly the Bournes did not control it. Hugh chaired it, but he was joined by four itinerants, the Garners, Flesher and Hallam, and another member, Smith, peripheral to the story. Neither James Bourne nor Clowes was a nominee. The itinerants might be in a minority at Conference, but they controlled what business would be done by it, albeit temporarily (after the Bourne era it reverted to the usual 2:1 lay-itinerant format).

In 1839, the GC was expanded to 25 members, and in ostensible deference to his advancing years it was decreed that 'General Committee letters must not be directed to Hugh Bourne'. For the first time, the book-room's accounts were published, and the minutes record that they were 'examined and audited by Conference'. This though concealed mounting chaos. John Hallam was a well-respected preacher but a poor administrator; he understood the need to get the publishing arm wrested from the Bournes, but he failed to implement sensible financial controls and allowed James Bourne to continue to extract money from the business. John Flesher was horrified to find that James Bourne and John Hancock treated the book-room as a personal bank. When he further discovered that James' credit was not good, and that the loans to Hancock were unsecured, he knew he had to act.

The Bournes still appeared to be in charge but had lost whatever control they had previously exercised over Conference. In 1840 it agreed to appoint London printers as alternates to Bemersley, so that extra print-runs could be organised promptly – even though

James Bourne was President that year.⁵⁷ Over the next two years, the GC expanded further to 35, and Clowes joined the Preparatory Committee. In 1842, Conference retired both Clowes, who had been a supernumerary for 15 years, and preached only when fit enough to do so, and Bourne, who was still completely active and engaged. However the reality of his standing was betrayed in the quoted journal extract above.

John Hancock, no doubt as great a sinner in financial matters as James Bourne, died in 1843; James lost the printing business to London at that year's annual Conference; and by the November was declared bankrupt. He thereupon lost all offices in the connexion. That year's Conference minutes were printed in London, declaring the connexional offices to be there too; and to complete Bourne's eclipse Conference relocated General Committee meetings to London – to be held weekly, on Wednesdays. Bourne's last office was now purely formal.⁵⁸ It also meant that, as with the Wesleyans, the stationing committee could ensure that specially created supernumerary metropolitan jobs were reserved for GC itinerants. The Conference would continue to appear 'democratic' and 'lay', but the reality of daily operations was that after 1843 they were in the hands of the leading itinerants at connexional level, while laymen continued to dominate the Districts. The scene was set for decades of internal power-struggles between them.

So Bourne's power was never as extensive as later writers have suggested. In particular, the apparently iron grip that Bourne built up between 1811 and 1828, then exercised over the movement between 1828 and 1840, was not so much overstated as narrower than

⁵⁷ Holographic PM Conference Journals to 1847, MARC, f.238, decisions 25-27.

⁵⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p 381ff. In later years prosperous lay figures would relocate to London in order to exercise more influence, but this was not a factor in the 1840s. For example Henry Johnson McCulloch, who owned a mining engineering and coal merchant's business based in York up to the date of the 1861 Census: RG9/3547/62/54, and stated by Kendall, *Origin* (ii, pp. 533-4) to have been based there as late as 1866. He became an inaugural Director of the connexional Insurance Fund, moving to London thereafter: despite the spelling and birthplace mismatches he is the same man as listed (1871) at Census Ref RG10/271/47/7, as evidenced by the servants' origins (York) and the presence of a PM itinerant visitor.

reported. Until around 1840, the apparent organisational cohesion suggested by the panoply of mechanisms and connexional titles was to a large extent illusory: the Bournes controlled the book-room, but could not control its finances because they were dependent upon circuits remitting net proceeds promptly and fully, which often they did not; and although they received quarterly reports from every itinerant in the movement they had neither the resources to read and digest them nor the clout to act on any problems discerned from them. By controlling the pattern and style of publication, the Bournes could set the tone and build the legends, both feeding and responding to a taste for the heroic among the followers; and that affected how the next generation saw themselves and their movement. But it did not constitute operational control; and if Districts chose to disagree with the Bemersley line, then there was little that the Bourne camp could do about it. In short, the Bournes influenced and shaped, but did not control, connexional operations; and they condemned their successors to at least two generations of struggle to establish effective governance.

SUMMARY

A discreet battle for the soul of Primitive Methodism took place between 1812 and 1819. Bourne's vision for his movement prevailed, but his victory was at best a partial one. The Prims inherited a shared set of values and ambitions enshrined in a set of heroic legends, which buoyed up the followers and energised the activists. The result was a movement with a national presence by the start of the 1840s. Throughout that period, Bourne shaped the pattern of connexional publications in support of that image; but in monopolising a narrow administrative power-base, he prevented the emergence of an effective national leadership that might have dealt with the issues that accompanied the changing status of the connexion. He also faced the next generation with two headaches: first, the bad blood

between him and Clowes; and second, the pernicious consequences of a few Tunstall figures around James Bourne who had operated 'under the radar', using the connexion as a milch-cow for decades.

The men who succeeded to office cleared out the book-room problems rapidly, and did a good job of building the leadership caucus required; but they failed utterly to break free from the discourse. Indeed they operated within it. Had they succeeded around 1849, they might have become the inheritors of the Wesleyan mantle; instead modernisers and traditionalists were still at loggerheads sixty years later. Yet the two most pernicious legacies are that Bourne managed to get those who survived him to undertake a conspiracy of silence, and to allow the myths and legends to become self-fulfilling. Historians, faced with a lack of literary evidence to the contrary, may have seen in the movements' manifestly humble mature character confirmation of the legends of its humble origins. For the present writer however, the perspective above, in which the legends begat that mature reality, is the preferred interpretation sitting more comfortably with the insights based on the movement's trajectory, and with Bourne's role and character. The research chapters that follow report the further investigations conducted to uncover evidence that supports or confounds this view and the more common alternative.

Early baptismal registers represent one of the most substantial surviving records of Primitive Methodism's first half-century.¹ In an early national analysis, Alan Gilbert concluded that while there was a gradation of prosperity from Congregationalists to the Prims, the essential pattern was one of commonality, in that all dissenting denominations had a majority following among the poorer fractions of society.² By contrast, some comparative local studies have found a more pronounced prosperity gap between the Prims and others.³ This chapter sets out to better understand the evidence.

For resource reasons, a three-fold approach was adopted. First, existing large-scale datasets were subject to further analysis; second, sample early registers for PM and Wesleyan circuits covering the former's North Staffs birthplace were analysed in depth for direct comparison; and third, transcriptions of registers by genealogical groups provided longitudinal data of the changing social fractions within the same PM congregations over a 30-50 year period.

PM registers offered a challenge not generally encountered among other denominations. While they called for information that competitors often did not, the modes of completion meant that some of it was frequently missing or misleading, because many baptisms were conducted in the absence of the register. In Tunstall's case, there was a discernible monthly cycle at major venues; Sunday baptisms on programmed dates were generally

¹ Few if any pre-1900 registers may today be consulted in the original form. Those gathered by the Registrar-General following the introduction of civil registration are available as microfilm copies, mainly in the RG4 series; most others are photographic copies made by the Church of Latter-Day Saints. They are referenced throughout the work in abbreviated format, when first cited either as RG4 plus serial identifier, as LDS, or more fully in other cases. Subsequent entries will be further abbreviated to chapel or circuit name plus date of entry.

² Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 62.

³ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989; Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*; but not Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth, 1740 – 1865*, Oxford, 1994. (Detailed citations when substantively discussed.)

complete; others generally were not; and non-Sabbath non-Tunstall baptisms were particularly prone to omissions. In addition, the Prims had the problem that there were many baptisers – 93 in a 17-year period – while many entries were either part-completed in advance or transcribed later from an intervening record.⁴ Many records were lost entirely: a Cannock instance in 1813 was not unique, although it is the earliest known.⁵ Discrepancies between chapel and circuit registers confirm that the problem was recurring.⁶ Lesser places' chapel records have not survived, and it is likely that their proportion of non-transcribed entries would be even higher. For example, the first baptism recorded along the Cheshire/Staffordshire border was in 1831 but thirteen years previously the connexion already had five other places operating in that locality.⁷ It is unlikely that none had occurred there earlier; in South Cheshire, Burland branch maintained its own baptismal records from 1826, and the Preston Brook circuit did so from 1824. Yet while the registers are incomplete, scrutiny gave no grounds for thinking them to be unrepresentative.

EMPLOYMENT ANALYSIS

There remains however a broader problem: the dubious assumptions on which the methodology rests. Paternal employments are taken to be an analogue for socio-economic status, and fathers to reflect the social profile of the congregation as a whole. Furthermore, the method hinges upon the system of mapping from job to status. Researchers have

⁴ Tunstall PM registers, RG4/3308, evident in entries dated 12th November 1826, 5th October 1828 and 4th October 1836. The register accompanied the preacher in the second case, but not in 1826 (when entries were largely completed by a scribe); the 1836 entries were completed out-of-sequence in May 1837, mainly in a hand other than that of the signatory.

⁵ Bourne Journals, F f. 312, 6th June 1813.

⁶ Only 29 of the 32 entries in the Burslem register (according to the on-line records of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints) appear in the circuit register. The omissions are the baptisms of children named Williams (22nd June 1830), Simcock (6th March 1831) and Potter (22nd January 1832).

⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p 508: the 27th January 1831 baptism (Tunstall PM register) was at Checkley; all six places were located on or close to the Newcastle-Nantwich turnpike.

generally chosen ones narrowly fitted to their immediate purpose; and sometimes their systems are incompatible. So Ambler and Obelkevich only identified specific groups such as farmers and labourers, but the results are difficult to compare with those who, needing more detail, used the Registrar-General's classification system. As Mr Pooter reminds us, the Victorian clerk may have employed a domestic servant, underlining the dangers of importing twentieth-century relativities.⁸ Four writers used a different approach which avoided that problem, but at the expense of producing results that are equally hard to reconcile with it, or each other. Gilbert harked back to a world of ranks and orders, which had not yet disappeared: he classified baptismal fathers among the gentry, commerce, farming, artisans and skilled trades, the semi-skilled, the unskilled, and 'others'.⁹ It exposed interdenominational differences, but failed to identify a key group, professionals, who were included along with for example fishermen in the catch-all category. Equally problematic was Snell's approach, which included miners with the unskilled. It too had to be set aside.¹⁰ Mark Smith, although also conducting a local study, deployed a more elaborate system that recognised the leadership importance of the professionals, featuring a seven-tier scale, running from major employers or capital-holders plus gentry down to the labourers and marginally employed.¹¹ At first sight, it appears to be a less sophisticated fractioning of the workforce than that elaborated by Michael Watts, which featured an 11-step social ladder that replaced Smith's top three tiers with six, and added a fifth manual labour group to Smith's four by distinguishing depressed industries.¹² But whereas Watts used contemporary average earnings as his benchmark, Smith's assessments partly reflect

⁸ George and Weedon Grossmith, *The Diary of a Nobody*, London, 1892. His domestic servant, Sarah, appears as early as the third sentence in the fictional diary. It reads as follows:

Cummings, Gowing, and our other intimate friends always come to the little side entrance, which saves the servant the trouble of going up to the front door, thereby taking her from her work.

(consulted in e-book format: www.gutenberg.org/files/1026/1026-h/1026-h.htm).

⁹ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p 63, Table 3.1.

¹⁰ Keith Snell, *Church and Chapel in the North Midlands: Religious Observance in the Nineteenth Century*, Leicester, 1991, pp. 43-4. The same approach was adopted in Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire'.

¹¹ Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society*, p 279.

¹² Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p 310ff.

status. In consequence, he placed shoemakers and silk-weavers together above engineers and boilermakers, who in turn ranked above hatters; Watts ranked these in the reverse order, and in addition classed the weavers as 'depressed' – groups that had hitherto had considerable status and control over their working lives, but were now squeezed by rising capacity and technology. Watts' approach, though not problem-free, offers the best overall fit to this research, particularly in identifying depressed workers.

More than the others named, he devoted considerable effort to examination of the assumptions necessary in using baptismal data, and the risks entailed.¹³ The following summarises previously identified problems, but suggests further pitfalls. First, there is a risk of double-counting employments where a series of sibling baptisms occurs. The problem of fathers presenting with different mothers, a not-inconsiderable risk given the high incidence of maternal mortality, was suspected, but few possible cases emerged from over 600 baptisms examined: the risk was discounted. This left cases of parents who baptised several children at once, and who baptised infants at intervals over a period of years or decades. The first was easy to identify and eliminate; the second much less so. Prior to the widespread availability of good spreadsheet packages featuring multiple sort capability, the identification and removal of subsequent baptisms by the same parent set was both extremely laborious and error-prone. Even when conducted effectively, cleaning the registers has to confront the issues of incomplete data, dubious orthography, and the analyst's judgement: was William Rowland, a miner married to Hannah, the same man as the labourer and wife who shared those names and baptised a child two years later?¹⁴ Similarly, was the potter John Alcock/Allcock married to Ellen/Ellin/Eileen Lees/Leigh

¹³ Ibid., p. 306ff.

¹⁴ Tunstall PM registers, 1st January 1828, and 7th February 1830.

one, two or three fathers?¹⁵ Answers would no doubt vary, but perhaps as important, would different analysts agree that these are potential instances?

Two writers chose to ignore the problem of repeat appearances, arguing that the effect of differential fertility was negligible. Yet the effect is a compound both of fertility and propensity to baptise; and when the methods were comparatively applied to the Tunstall results, the high-skill fraction was over four percentage points higher if duplications were left in the sample.¹⁶ Both may thus have been prone to over-sampling the 'artisan' (Gilbert) or 'skilled' (Snell) group.

Second, there is the issue of life-cycle changes in circumstances, which was more pronounced in Victorian times than today, with the incidence of poverty peaking first with the onset of child-rearing and then again with old age.¹⁷ Watts recognised the problem but dismissed it, agreeing with an earlier view 'that the status of employer and wage-earner in many craft occupations was a life-cycle stage rather than a class division'.¹⁸ Admittedly, the gap in status between the two roles was small when dealing with high-status artisans who as masters typically had few employees, but that between the journeyman shoemaker and the retailer selling shoes manufactured both by him and his employees – and perhaps employing a shop assistant in addition – represented a significant step-up. Ambler had earlier argued that life-cycle effects might explain why farmers were more likely to feature as officials than fathers: they inherited the farm tenancy only after their fertile years.¹⁹

¹⁵ Tunstall PM registers, 2nd May 1824, 3rd September 1826, and 4th October 1829.

¹⁶ The Tunstall PM registers for 1820-1837 featured 58% high-skill employments among unique baptismal fathers, but 62% when all instances including repeats were used as the basis of calculation.

¹⁷ John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrialisation in Three English Towns*, London, 1974, p. 98.

¹⁸ Watt, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p 310, citing the view of Robert Morris, *Class, Power, and Social Structure in British Nineteenth-Century Towns*, 1986, p. 13.

¹⁹ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p 63.

Another, more damaging possible explanation for Ambler's observation exists though, as discussed below in the context of factors unique to, or particularly affecting, the Prims.

This problem was partially addressed by Smith by consulting gazetteers, but that is insupportable in the context of a national survey; Watts recognised the issue but concluded after examining Oldham using his model and Smith's that the differences were marginal. Watts accepted that when he placed some trades, e.g. bakers, in a retailer category, and tailors, for example, in his semi-skilled category, he thereby over- or under-reported the status of some of the two respective groups, but concluded the effects were likely to be small.²⁰ It might however be dangerous in local studies, and inspection suggests that Oldham was untypical in having a low proportion of workers vulnerable to under-reporting. It is also liable to more pronounced interdenominational effects if affiliation by trade occurred – as it clearly did.²¹ Examination of the Newcastle-under-Lyme registers indicated that while the incidence of the semi-skilled varied a little among three Methodist denominations, the mix varied sharply: the Wesleyans had a virtual monopoly of the miners, who were very unlikely to conceal the self-employed; whereas five groups placed in semi-skilled (dyers, hairdressers, tailors, tanners and shoemakers) were more likely to do so, and they were twice as common in New Connexion, and three times as common in PM, registers as they were in Wesleyan ones.

Third, since consistent economic factors predisposed some groups to remain unmarried, they would be under-represented by a sample of fertile males whose children were presented for baptism – e.g., the youngest daughter of a prosperous widower, or the bachelor son of a farmer deferring marriage until inheriting the farm.

²⁰ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 309/10fn.

²¹ Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 114.

Fourth, the method requires that those coming forward for baptism were a representative sample even of the fertile, and two writers have touched upon the issue, although they drew different inferences from their findings. Obelkevich found a high proportion of what he called 'mixed' baptisms, i.e., parents baptising one child in the Anglican tradition, another in a Methodist chapel, and he found a varying propensity to do so by class, concluding from it that the increased tendency of labourers to opt for 'mixed' baptisms reflected their view of it as a rite of passage rather than a religious milestone.²² He did not set out to measure – even had it been possible to do so – instances of devoted PM followers who chose Anglican baptism only, or to discern possible reasons for that. Watts went to some pains to argue that the problem of baptismal tourists – parents choosing baptism in a chapel for reasons other than affiliation – was unlikely to have affected the figures much, even if some Nonconformists were prepared to baptise all-comers: the bigger issue was missing baptisms, not rogue presences. For him, therefore, choice of Methodist baptism signalled strong commitment and the registers were a reliable source. However, that implicitly assumed that absences occurred in a random, non-skewing, manner.²³ Thus both authors, for different reasons, chose not to pursue the possibility of class-based absence from registers.

Yet selective avoidance on status grounds of PM baptisms by its more well-heeled followers is not only probable: it happened. This is only one of three further factors not generally aired, each of which has potentially significant implications for the results on view in PM registers. The fact that the children of Bourne's nieces, of Thomas Bateman,

²² Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 240. This might, incidentally, explain the Tunstall result of higher skilled fractions where duplications were not removed: it would be a result of differing propensity to baptise, rather than differential fertility.

²³ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 308-9.

and of John Flesher all appeared in Anglican baptismal registers, while only two PM itinerant preachers, and no high-profile founding figures, were listed as having baptised a child in the head circuit of the connexion during the 1820-1837 era, had to raise the possibility that Watts' assumption was unduly optimistic.²⁴ Concerns about social status may have weighed more heavily than denominational loyalty in the baptismal choices of the more well-heeled followers, however deep their commitment. This might also mean that while Ambler detected the problem of missing farmers, he was perhaps wrong to assume that a life-cycle explanation accounted for all of them. Such action would not be too surprising: as Watts noted, until 1837 there was a strong case for attesting paternity via the established church to establish inheritance rights, in particular that to heritable tenancies, and there may have been a lingering preference to continue to do so thereafter. It was, of course, a bigger issue for families which had something to leave to their descendants. For Methodist scholars, the preference was just a lingering survival of the 'Church Methodist' tradition; to modern students of the Prims' social make-up, it is an elephant-trap.

The next factor likely to have impacted, probably exclusively, on the Prims was that of deliberate downgrading of self-reported status. Obelkevich may have detected the phenomenon, but accorded it a contrary significance. When the Gainsborough PM circuit plan of 1874 described its preachers as 'Labourers' and its chapels as 'Harvest Fields', he chose to see this as the working-class ethos of the movement on display.²⁵ Yet as Gilbert had earlier noted, this agrarian imagery had a long and distinctly un-proletarian pedigree: in 1746 John Wesley represented the preacher's role as the labourer bringing in God's

²⁴ Preacher baptisms discussed later in this chapter; senior figures' Anglican preferences are discussed in Chapter 9.

²⁵ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 242.

harvest.²⁶ It was a biblical impulse rather than a piece of class solidarity, and the old-fashioned Prims maintained this tradition, with their particular attachment to ‘praying labourers’. Within the heroic discourse, to be a labourer in the cause of Jesus was to be a person of some status, and it was used as a term of approbation.²⁷ As discussed in Chapter 3, there would appear to be some indication, among Hull’s earliest class-leaders, of a taste for understating job status, and this would be consistent with a discourse-driven preference for humility.

There is, though, a sixth and final issue – the term ‘labourer’ itself. The onset of industrialisation created a bewildering range of specific job titles, and some of them were in truth no more skilled than the labourer jobs left behind. They just paid better, and helped to power the move from a rural to an urbanising world. They did indeed rank above *urban* labourers, but it must be recognised that the industrial workplace was a much more differentiated environment than the rural one left behind: the man who by dint of ambition recorded himself in five different occupations over a period of 16 years (labourer, delver, basket-maker, wool merchant, and coal dealer) would have been unlikely to achieve that in an agrarian setting.²⁸ Yet that did not mean that a rural labourer was necessarily indigent or lacked status. For example, Joseph Bromfield, born around 1810 and who died in 1900, is buried in Englesea Brook PM graveyard, occupying a prominent position immediately within the gates. The headstone, despite not having weathered well, is surprisingly ornate for a labourer, which is how he is described in the censuses for 1841-1881 (and in the 1851 Census, additionally as a local preacher). He lived within the grounds of the Crewe Hall Estate; and although the exact house cannot be pinpointed, the estate properties (all of

²⁶ Wesleyan Conference Minutes, cited by Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 60.

²⁷ Hugh Bourne in relation to William Clowes: quoted in Walford, *Life*, i, p. 122.

²⁸ Henry Sugden baptised six children in Town Lane PM Chapel between 1857 and 1873: Calverley PM entries dated 18th October, 1857; 26th February 1865; 20th January 1867; 24th January 1869; 29th January 1871; and 21st July 1873, at www.calverley.info/tlpm.htm.

which predate this period) are sizeable. Furthermore, when a nearby PM chapel was opened in 1897 at Oakhanger, in addition to the nine ordinary commemorative tablets denoting donors, there were three larger ones in the main face of the chapel, the largest of which (by some margin) was Joseph's. The two flanking tablets carry the names of the gentry occupants of Oakhanger Hall and Wimboldsley Hall. It is unlikely that he was singled out for the honour on the grounds of seniority; the usual reason was the value of the donation. Joseph left no will, and his son Joseph William, also a labourer, died in 1919; he is buried in the family plot. Interestingly though – given that the bachelor son lived with the family of his niece after the death of his parents – his will was probated at the Principal Probate Office, despite having movable assets approaching £400. The executors were a PM minister and one John Capper, blacksmith.²⁹ It would not be too large a leap to imagine that the latter was a descendant of Joseph Capper, early preacher and Chartist. These are only inferential, but suggest that Joseph senior was rather more prosperous and more highly regarded than the employment designation would allow.³⁰ His case added to a suspicion raised in the examination of numerous rural registers (Anglican as well as PM) by the present writer. Higher-status employments such as stockman, ploughman or the like were usually absent from paternal descriptions, even although the jobs themselves clearly were present in the rural economy. These attracted premium wages and accommodation; the job-holders had more of a stake in society, and greater incentive to baptise their children. It raised the possibility that 'labourer' was a means of describing a person whose family had no land tenure, rather than a job description as such.

²⁹ 1901 Census, RG13/3354/26/12; 1911 Census, RG14/21759; National Probate Calendar, 1920.

³⁰ The chapel and his tablet can be seen at www.moston.org/churches.html, following the navigation to Oakhanger. Flanking tablet entries were confirmed by personal visit. The 1851 Census entry is HO107/2169/282/2; the 1881 entry (he being widowed and remarried) is RG11/3545/46/16.

The suspicion was tested by selecting one rural township at random (Leekfrith, Staffordshire) and analysing the 1841, 1861 and 1881 censuses, chosen so as to capture long-run classification behaviour. The first two are manuscript records of poor quality, not improved by microfilming, yet there were only two entries, dubious or otherwise, in the 1841 census for differentiated employments among agrarian employees: one woodsman and one farm bailiff. The rest were either employed in ancillary trades such as blacksmithing or were agricultural labourers, or farm servants. In 1861, four people were graced with the description 'cowman' or 'cowsman' – but all were the sons of the householder, the farmer, whereas the single dairymaid and gamekeeper were unrelated employees. In 1881, the records had been printed before archiving, and so the microfilm record was of a uniformly high standard. 142 of the township's adults were described as having an agricultural employment, other than 'farmer'. Only seven of these had differentiated job titles: a farm bailiff, a gamekeeper, a family of three cattle dealers, a 'teamsman' and a 'cowman'. None lived under a farmer's roof, and all thus self-described to the returning officer.³¹ Of the remaining 135, not one was listed as a ploughman or any other differentiated job title. Fifty-six were related by birth to the farmer, of whom 34 were given an employment description that reflected this: typically 'farmer's son' or 'daughter' as appropriate. The remaining 101 adult members of the agrarian workforce had a job title that clearly emphasised an inferior relationship, as servant or labourer. It suggests that, in rural areas, there remained a lingering adherence to the rank, not the employment or socio-economic standing, of the individual until quite late in the century. This factor applies to all rural congregations, of course, not just PM ones; but in a denomination where so many of the pivotal studies have been rural in character, the collective effect is to make a geographic reality appear to be a denominational one.

³¹ Census refs: 1841, HO107/1005/4; 1861, RG9/1948/17; 1881 RG11/2741/6.

To sum up: first, the extraction of employment evidence from baptismal registers requires considerable care to avoid distortion. Second, urban/rural distinctions due to apparently differing levels of skills may reflect not only substantive differences in the ranges of skilled jobs on offer in the two community types but also a lingering rural adherence to the concept of rank; and while some comparative local judgements are relatively immune, comparisons between differing types of location, or extrapolating from the local to the national, are not. Third, the assumptions made about mapping from jobs to status, by contrast, offer greater risks at local than national level. Fourth, there are three further effects that are likely to impact more (or perhaps at all) on the Primitive Methodists: the susceptibility to first-generation effects; to more socially elevated members absenting themselves from baptismal rites; and to those same groups understating their social position for spiritual or discourse reasons. The exercise thus hinges on the care exercised in extraction and interpretation of the data.

EXISTING STUDIES REVISITED

As outlined above, the results of existing studies are not usually directly comparable, and are rarely sufficiently specified to allow certainty as to the detailed counting and mapping process used; in addition, they are usually of slightly differing time-periods. The central problem with them, however, at least in regard to the Prims, is that none explores the sharp distinction in the denomination's profile between urban and rural counties when the results for studies covering the decades either side of 1840 are set out:³²

³² The inclusion of miners in 'unskilled' rules out the inclusion of the findings of Snell and Garrett here.

Table 6.1

Source	Coverage	% Incidence of unskilled among PM baptisms
Watts	National	29
Gilbert	National	22
Smith	Oldham	10-14
Hatcher	Hull	27
Ambler	S Lincs	63

Note 1: The method here depends on Watts' analyses, which show that labourers generally comprised 21/29ths of the unskilled; this fraction when applied to Ambler's data accounted for the unspecified unskilled; and so both his and Gilbert's results were adjusted accordingly.

Note 2: Smith's numbers for his class VII (unskilled) were 10% of PM baptisms, as compared with 11% for Anglican; but it is likely that they exclude some people classed as 'unskilled' in other analyses, hence the range figure quoted.

The two anomalous results are however not the result of sample problems or classification incompatibilities: Smith's figure may be based on a small sample, but it is consistent with the finding for other denominations in Oldham. It signals a local reality, not a classification issue. Ambler's result, meanwhile, is supported by Obelkevich's finding for the period 1844-75, when he calculated a figure of 72% for the three circuits of Gainsborough, Horncastle and Louth.³³ Watts' data (1830-1850) afford an explanation:

Table 6.2 Incidence of unskilled fathers by county type

Coverage in Watts data	% Incidence of unskilled	
	population	PM baptisms
Industrial counties	27	20
Rural counties	53	59
Lincolnshire	52	59

Note: Watts found sufficient PM baptisms in 22 counties to calculate social fractions; the result is thus not strictly national, but as it represents the great bulk of all recorded baptisms, it is a reliable indicator. The counties were Cheshire; Cumberland; Derbyshire; Durham; Lancashire; Leicestershire; Northumberland; Nottinghamshire; Shropshire; Staffordshire; Warwickshire; Yorkshire, East and West Ridings (Industrial); and Bedfordshire; Berkshire; Essex; Herefordshire; Huntingdonshire; Lincolnshire; Norfolk; Northamptonshire; and Wiltshire (Rural). (Watts, pp. 718-776.)

³³ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, p. 239. This is his 'labourer' figure, but there are no other unskilled categories omitted in his sample, and so he has apparently interpreted the term more widely than Ambler.

The results of the local studies, in short, were inevitable, and underline the problems of extrapolating from these to the national scale. Yet they also raise a further issue: not only was there a sharp urban-rural skills divide; there was also a significant difference in PM *relative* appeal to the unskilled which remains to be explained.

Watts' results rewarded further analysis, first by exposing the shifting social fractions by denomination in those counties where sufficiently robust answers could be derived. His 11-point scale was too detailed for the present purpose, and so was reduced to a set of five: non-manual including gentry and professionals (his I-VI inclusive); high-skill manual (VII and VIII), semi-skilled (IX), depressed industries (X) and the unskilled plus marginally employed (XI).³⁴ The exercise had to be restricted to those counties that appeared in two or more consecutive decades, to avoid misleading results arising solely from the sample mix changing: the most useful inter-decennial comparisons are those among eight industrial counties between the 1820s and 1830s, and the rural counties that appear in the 1840s-60s. In the first case, Watts' analyses also extended to Wesleyan circuits in the same counties, and these are included for comparison:

Table 6.3 Changing social fractions of PM fathers (Early Industrial)

Social fraction, 8 English counties ³⁵	Host %	Wesleyan %		Primitive %	
		1820s	1830s	1820s	1830s
Non-manual	20.4	18.5	19.4	7.2	6.7
High-skill	23.0	28.4	25.8	18.5	22.8
Semi-skilled	19.3	28.9	28.3	37.3	36.3
Depressed	9.9	10.5	12.6	14.3	13.7
Unskilled	27.4	13.6	13.8	22.7	20.6

Note: The host population social fractions are those in the 1841 Census, as extracted by Watts and weighted by county size. This applies also to tables 6.4 and 6.5 below.

³⁴ Data were extracted from Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, Appendix, Tables XV-LIV inclusive; pp. 718-776. His summarisation appears on p. 323.

³⁵ The counties were Cheshire, Cumberland, Derbyshire, Durham, Northumberland, Shropshire, Staffordshire and the West Riding.

The above indicates that although the Prims attracted a lower profile among baptismal fathers, the gap was most significant and sustained among the non-manual categories, with about a third of the proportion seen among the Wesleyans. Yet this conclusion must be treated with considerable reserve, given the predisposing factors to selective avoidance and under-reporting of status cited above. Second, the orthodox account would suggest that the growing strength of Primitive Methodism was achieved by replacing the Wesleyans among the poorer social fractions. Yet while the Prims roughly doubled in size from one decade to the other, Wesleyan social profile far from rising as their presence among the depressed and unskilled was eroded, in fact fell: they raised their depressed/unskilled presence by 2.3 percentage points, whilst the PM figure fell by 2.7 points. The Wesleyans, despite Werner's claims of gentrification in the post-Napoleonic era, were going down-market in search of recruits. Third, workers in depressed industries continued to prefer dissenting denominations in general – Congregationalists in the same counties, for example, averaged 13.0% (1820s) and 11.7% (1830s). Thus it would be hard to argue that either strand of Methodism was displacing other branches of Nonconformity. Overall, the results for these eight counties do not support the heroic account which sees the Prims as over-represented among the oppressed and most marginalised in the workforce. Later rural results are starkly different (no Wesleyan comparators were available):

Table 6.4 Changing social fractions of PM fathers (Early Rural)

Social fraction, in 4 later rural counties ³⁶	Host population	PM social fraction as %		
		1840s	1850s	1860s
Non-manual	20.1	9.3	7.8	8.7
High-skill	13.2	9.2	12.4	15.9
Semi-skilled	10.0	10.8	10.3	10.9
Depressed	0.9	0.6	0.0	0.1
Unskilled	55.9	70.0	69.5	64.4

³⁶ The counties were Bedfordshire, Essex, Huntingdonshire (1850s/60s only) and Northamptonshire.

Pulling these strands together suggests a more complex pattern of membership than is generally allowed. The key difference between Wesleyans and Prims is in the failure of the latter to appeal to the non-manual categories, although the respective contributions of failure to adhere or to make adherence overt are uncertain. Either way, they failed to establish themselves socially in the manner achieved by the Wesleyans who, while extending their appeal to more of the unskilled, were also becoming a more socially-acceptable church among the emergent middle classes. Both denominations were over-represented among the high-skill plus semi-skilled categories; but the Prims were much more strongly differentiated from the Old Connexion in rural than in industrial counties by their over-weight presence of the unskilled, a pattern that incidentally forms a north-south divide.

Three conclusions stand out, as aspects to confirm or validate: one, while the Prims baptised a lower social profile than their more aspirational competitors, the gap between them and their closest competitor, the Wesleyans, was modest. If the suggested socially-driven preference for the baptismal rites of the established church among the most committed of the upper echelons of the denomination was a significant factor, the gap was modest indeed. Two, they did not succeed by eroding the lower end of the Wesleyan social profile or by expanding the reach of Methodism to social strata previously beyond the old connexion's reach, but by expanding the total market share of Methodism in existing church-going strata. Three, there appears to be some systematic difference of appeal to the unskilled as between rural and industrial milieux. In order to further examine this more subtle pattern of PM origins and early shifts, the registers for the home circuit, Tunstall, and its near neighbour Newcastle-under-Lyme for the period 1820-1837 were examined more intensively and this readily allowed a perspective on the possible self-exclusion pattern.

PREACHERS AS BAPTISMAL FATHERS

Because so many preachers were named, one test was to measure how many of those who performed baptisms appeared in the registers as fathers. The 90 identifiable preachers (excluding three from other circuits: William Clowes, Hull, and Thomas King and John Skevington, East Midlands) included some bachelors or those whose children were long grown – notably Hugh and James Bourne respectively – but the connexion's early recourse to younger preachers would suggest that this group should have equalled or exceeded the population fertility norm. The birth-rate of 1820-1837 England is unlikely to have varied much from that during the balance of the century, when good figures are available thanks to universal registration. That indicates a probable range of 30-32 per 1000 pa, being respectively the lowest (1890s) and the adjacent (1840s) values.³⁷ Those 90 men did not practice for all 17 years of course, and mainly comprised local preachers; yet their fertile years may have spanned not only their period as baptisers but also some years around it.³⁸ Their mean date of first baptism was 1830, giving seven or more years of potential paternity during the currency of the registers; applying a 5-10 year range as the prudent limits of paternal availability, and the 30-32 per 1000 crude birth rate, produces a number of expected births between 54 and 115. The resulting baptisms were then sought.

Two of the first four entries in the Tunstall register were children of local preachers:³⁹ a child of Samuel Barber, son of the freed slave who was employed by Dr Johnson, and no

³⁷ John Golby, 'Population' in Clive Emsley, (ed), *State, Economy and Nation in Nineteenth Century Europe: Economy*, Milton Keynes, 2006, Table 2, p. 24.

³⁸ Several of the recognisable names from the founding years around 1811-1818 did not officiate at any baptisms until much later: Nixon and Steele (1826); Allcock and Wedgwood (1828); and James Bourne (1837).

³⁹ Tunstall PM registers, 13th July 1820 and 3rd June 1822: the latter is the first entry in the register; the 1820 entry appears fourth, suggesting that the earlier baptism was transcribed from other sources.

doubt named in his honour, who decamped from Wesleyanism when William Clowes was unchurched;⁴⁰ and a child of Joseph Cappur, the local preacher later jailed for Chartist activity.⁴¹ These examples proved surprisingly untypical of the preaching cadre. Only five further fathers emerged, despite careful scrutiny; and two of them were itinerants. The seven fathers produced 21 children for PM baptism (including the case of the Preston Brook itinerant, who had qualified by earlier baptising a child in the circuit) over the seventeen-year period.⁴² Discounting error (baptisms of preachers' children would be highly likely to be captured) the only remaining explanations are infertility, or the missing children were baptised elsewhere. A fertility rate of 20-40% of the population norm is, intuitively, hard to accept; and for at least one named preacher, the fact of Anglican baptisms can be demonstrated: John Walford officiated at 21 baptisms in Tunstall and Newcastle-under-Lyme circuits, but his children were baptised at Wybunbury parish church.⁴³

A further indicator is that while the five lay preachers who appeared as fathers were a blacksmith, brickmaker, labourer, potter and printer, 10 of the remaining 11 lay preachers who were absent as fathers but could be ascribed an employment designation from other sources proved to be either self-employed or of independent means. The data are not strong, but the fact that so few of the prosperous preachers appeared as fathers is hard to ignore, and suggest that these early registers may understate the presence of aspirational devotees among the faithful.

⁴⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 105.

⁴¹ *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser*, 27th May, 1843: surname rendered 'Capper'.

⁴² Tunstall PM registers, 10th June 1823; son baptised 29th July 1829.

⁴³ Detected only thanks to the Cheshire Parish Records Project: <http://www.csc.liv.ac.uk/~cprdb/>

PATERAL EMPLOYMENTS

Comparative examination of Wesleyan and PM registers for the same communities allows a more precise examination of the competitive reality than do county-level or national comparisons, where varying urban-rural presence would dominate the findings in some cases. Tunstall PM and Burslem WM registers provided the opportunity to do so, as did those for Higherland PM and Newcastle-under-Lyme WM.⁴⁴ The areas differed industrially from one another, and together they were not representative of the county as a whole. County host and denominational figures are provided by way of comparison, and the first analysis concerns only the Tunstall/Burslem pattern. Each unique father was classed using Watts' classification system, with the following results.⁴⁵

Table 6.5 Changing social fractions of PM fathers (Early Potteries)

Social fraction, Potteries	Staffs Host %	Staffs Wes %	Staffs PM%	Burslem Wes %		Tunstall PM %	
				1820s	1830s	1820s	1830s
Non-manual	16.4	11.2	6.1	6.8	9.4	3.1	5.0
High-skill	33.0	44.1	49.4	57.3	52.6	63.4	55.0
Semi-skilled	20.3	27.9	19.0	25.9	27.1	18.4	21.8
Depressed	3.0	2.7	1.6	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0
Unskilled	27.3	14.1	23.8	10.0	10.5	15.4	18.3

Note 1: Tunstall covered a small area of South Cheshire that Burslem did not, but very few baptisms from there survived to the record.

Note 2: No host population social fractions could be derived below county level, and the consistent county-circuit gaps in denominational results suggest that the Potteries had fewer elite and more skilled workers than the county as a whole. Crucially though, both county and local results show a higher incidence of high-skill PM than Wesleyan fathers in the home circuit.

The numbers presenting in the two periods did not change much among the Wesleyans (239 rising to 265) but rose significantly among the Prims (65 to 270, excluding the 72

⁴⁴ The Burslem WM circuit originally included Newcastle-under-Lyme, but the latter chapel maintained a separate register which was not duplicated in the circuit one.

⁴⁵ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 760/1.

parent sets presenting in the final week).⁴⁶ The results bear out the eight-county finding: the Prims did not succeed in the Potteries by displacing the Wesleyans in the lowest strata of churchgoers. The weak presence of non-manual occupations was notable in both connexions, but more particularly among the Prims, although the absent preachers finding underlines the need for caution. Overall, the data indicate that in the Potteries, the Prims' initial appeal was to the skilled end of the employment spectrum, in which regard they outdid the Wesleyans.

The comparison is clouded slightly by the effect of the 'potter' designation – allocated to high-skill, although its use may have signified the employment area rather than the skill level. That was one reason for extending the analysis to the adjacent circuit of Newcastle-under-Lyme. There, potters formed a rather smaller proportion of the workforce, but there were other important factors in operation. There was a stronger Anglican presence, and competition from Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodist New Connexion. The number of PM baptisms (60 parent sets only) was perhaps a little low to extract confident results, and could not support an 1820/30s comparison; accordingly the table below aggregates the two periods.

Table 6.6 Social fractions of PM fathers, Newcastle-under-Lyme

Social fraction, 1820/30s	Host population	Wesleyan %	Primitive %
Non-manual	16.4	7.8	1.7
High-skill	33.0	47.2	41.7
Semi-skilled	20.3	22.1	23.3
Depressed	3.0	2.9	8.3
Unskilled	27.3	20.0	25.0

⁴⁶ In Tunstall and Hull, there was a sudden PM rush to baptise in the final week before civil registration: it did not occur in any other registers or transcriptions uncovered (totalling in excess of fifty circuits examined), and did not comprise infants, as was the norm at other times, but children, adolescents and young adults. It is thus clear that these were not representative of 1837 fathers; and it cannot even be asserted with confidence that they were PM adherents.

The two pairs of circuits, though industrial neighbours, exhibited the expected pronounced differences; yet the two denominations exhibit more similarities than one might have expected. The key finding – accepting the limits imposed by the small sample size – is that the Prims were again over-represented among the skilled and semi-skilled fractions. So the Potteries, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire and ‘industrial’ eight-county findings concur: the early Prims of the towns and industrial villages were drawn from the skilled end of the spectrum.

PARENTAL LITERACY

The PM registers can cast a different light on the issue of hardship/poverty/class, because they captured literacy evidence from parental signatures. Perhaps the most thorough study of the connection between illiteracy and a preference for Nonconformist worship is that conducted by Watts. He concluded that a solid link existed between the two, by comparing the worship density as at 1851 with the incidence of attesting by mark in marriage registers, which he used to buttress his view that ‘Nonconformity in England and Wales was most popular in its most unsophisticated form.’⁴⁷ It is fair to observe, though, that not all writers have been persuaded that signature evidence is a reliable indicator of poverty or even of illiteracy, for several reasons. Hilaire Belloc doubted the statistics based on personal experience of people who grew up in the years before universal education began to make inroads to the illiteracy ‘problem’, and this is consistent with the fact that many more people could read than write.⁴⁸ More recently at least one writer has argued that household, rather than personal, illiteracy was the real determinant of exclusion from the world of ideas and the possibility of economic progress – and that that was always much

⁴⁷ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 100ff; quotation p. 100; data tables p. 101-2 and pp. 682-701.

⁴⁸ Robert Webb, ‘Working Class Readers in Early Victorian England’, in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 65, No. 256 (Jul., 1950), pp. 333-351.

lower than personal percentages.⁴⁹ George Edwards, who gained literacy only as an adult, reminds us, too, that illiteracy was not a simple yes/no state.⁵⁰ Most of all, though, illiteracy was not the disqualifier then that it is today. For example Thomas Bateman, whose life is discussed in Chapter 9, was the son of a successful but illiterate tenant farmer, and as will be apparent in Chapter 7, his is not the only case of illiteracy proving no barrier to economic progress. These cases suggest that the nineteenth-century linkage between illiteracy and disadvantage was perhaps more indirect than has on occasion been proposed, unreliable at the level of the individual, and only approximate at population level.

The wider evidence across England is examined in the following chapter, but the Potteries registers allow a particularly pointed examination: if illiteracy is a marker for hardship, and hardship signals an increased propensity to affiliate, fewer of the literate should be present in *any* PM registers than in the source population. Watts provided county-level figures at 1841, and registration district figures at 1851; given the variability across the county, the latter are preferred as a host measure, even though the long rise in measured literacy across the era is likely to yield a result that disfavours the Prims. A number of checks were made on the data to verify its robustness, but in each case, the evidence provided no cause for concern; following which the calculation of PM parental literacy produced the following results.

Table 6.7 Literacy in North Staffs Registration Districts approximating to two PM circuits

Literacy	
PM (1820-37)	Host (1851)
47.8	45.3

Note 1: Host literacy figures derived from Watts, Table XIV, p 700, are the average of Newcastle and Wolstanton district figures, weighted in proportion to the numbers of PM baptisms in the two circuits.

⁴⁹ David Vincent, *The End of Literacy: The Growth and Measurement of British Public Education Since the Early 19th Century*, working paper no 67, Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester, 2009.

⁵⁰ George Edwards, *From Crow-Scaring to Westminster, an Autobiography*, London, 1922, p. 31ff

Chapter 6: The Baptismal Registers

Note 2: The host figures are based on marriage registers, which axiomatically comprise equal numbers of males and females; the baptismal records featured more women's entries than men's and the PM result is corrected to a 50:50 male-female weighting.

So these earliest of PM adherents were more literate than the population norm; and perhaps by more than the measured 2.5 percentage point gap. The finding would be of modest significance but for the fact that it confounds the hardship hypothesis, which predicts the opposite result.

One final sidelight emerged too: the Newcastle preacher, John Hinchco, attested the birth of his first child with a mark; but when he officiated in Tunstall three years later, he signed his name. The signature is the same as that which appears in subsequent baptisms of his children in Newcastle, and so he had been moved to learn to write during that time.⁵¹ He was the only illiterate local preacher found among the baptisers (itinerants could not be illiterate, because they were required to submit quarterly written reports). George Edwards' life was exceptional, but perhaps his literacy journey was – for Prim local preachers – less so. Inspired exhortation could only go so far; from early in the connexion's history the need to read scriptures, a desire to sign documents, and implicit peer-group pressure together shaped a literate cadre.

WORKPLACE AFFILIATION vs SECTARIAN ASSOCIATION

Differential clustering of employments between denominations earlier suggested that workplace affiliation was important in both strands of Methodism. The registers also, though, signalled the importance of family links. One unusual name combination prompted this: on Sunday 11th December 1836, Samuel Sproston signed the register as

⁵¹ Illiterate, 29th May 1825; literate 25th December 1829; signature matches that of Tunstall entries nos. 83-85, of 5th October 1828.

father of a son named Stanyer. The previous year, a man named Stanyer Sproston had signed for the birth of his daughter; the fathers were clearly related. This indication cut across Obelkevich's observation that the pattern of PM adherence was initially one that enrolled individuals who 'often had to endure disapproval and opposition from their families', an image that echoes Prim legends.⁵² The method worked well here because of the conjunction of unusual Christian and surnames, but clearly would not be enlightening for more common ones. Another indicator though was that there were cases where apparent siblings chose to baptise children in a single ceremony. Thus two married women both née Nixon, baptised children on the same day in 1831.⁵³ There is no certainty that they were sisters, but the inference is strong. A more pronounced example occurred at Biddulph Moor. In 1831, John Bailey shared a baptismal occasion with one Joseph Bailey. The following day Jane Beech, née Bailey, baptised a daughter. The other child baptised there that day was named Mayer. Five years later, John baptised another child. In the same ceremony, another woman whose maiden name was Bailey also baptised two children. Her husband was named Luke Hulme and two women née Hulme, Maria Sharp and Mary Nixon, baptised two more children. The sixth and last name sharing the ceremony was Mayer.⁵⁴ It suggests that family networks played a part in PM affiliation here, at least. Although the hypothesis of a wider applicability of family association is appealing, these cases are indicative only, as is the frequent presence of evidence of its effect on leader behaviour. For example, both John Flesher and John Petty, with paternal endorsement, switched allegiance from demure Wesleyanism to boisterous Ranterism, and there are instances of early pairs or trios of sibling preachers. Six of the 15 preachers on the inaugural PM circuit plan comprised two pairs of brothers, and two brothers-in-law (the

⁵² Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 234/5; Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 354-5.

⁵³ Tunstall PM registers, 13th February 1831.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 14th March 1831; and 4th October 1836.

Chapter 6: The Baptismal Registers

Bournes, the Alcocks, and Clowes-Woodnorth);⁵⁵ and some areas bore early fruit because of the favourable reception afforded by networks of like-minded friends, as at Ramsor even before 1811. Here, 'the Heatons of Farley, the Sergeants of Kingsley, the Buxtons, the Critchelows, the Dreacotts, the Salts of Wootton, and, above all, the Brothers Horobin' provided both hospitality and preaching labour.⁵⁶ Others that might be cited are: Sampson Turner, one of five members of the same family converted at an 1813 camp-meeting, and later a prominent itinerant; the three Garner brothers, all destined to occupy high office, converted in the Nottinghamshire revival of 1816/17; Thomas Brownsword and his two sisters, all preachers around 1820; the Waller brothers of Manchester, former Wesleyan class-leaders and prosperous mill-owners; and the Antliff brothers, the elder of whom was an itinerant by 1830.⁵⁷ For the notables, therefore, family association was a consistent feature of the early years.

The question is whether the Baileys and Hulmes – possibly linked to the Mayers – of Biddulph Moor were an oddity, or if such association was also true for the followers at large, and here the task of measuring the relative intensity of family links in the pre-1837 era is particularly challenging, without the ready access to vital registration data and named censuses. If however siblings had a higher propensity to enrol in the sectarian phase but less so later, it ought to be reflected in the surname patterns of the parental populations of the two movements in any one geographic area. A base level of surname repetitions between unrelated individuals will occur everywhere, and given the regional variability that exists, the exact character of clustering will vary from place to place. The effect ought, however, to impact on large groups within the same geographic area to the same

⁵⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 559.

⁵⁶ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 93.

⁵⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 169, 242, 517; *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 19-20, 368, 376. The writer is indebted to the Revd Stephen Hatcher for the fact of a third Brownsword sibling active in the cause.

extent, and so while the absolute levels of matches carry no necessary significance, sustained differences between groups drawn from the same geographic area are probable signals of differing levels of familial association. It is only supportable as a method for the earlier years however: a third associative factor, that of marriage within the congregation, was an increasingly important characteristic of Methodism generally and the Primitives in particular, and in the longer run this would come to swamp any shifts in other patterns of influence. On that basis, there ought to be some indication in the incidence and pattern of surname repeats, if indeed the earliest Prims were more sectarian than their Wesleyan contemporaries. Unfortunately the inter-connexional comparison had to be restricted to males only, and could not be applied in Newcastle-under-Lyme because its early PM registers extended to only 60 fathers, but the exercise was repeated for Newcastle Wesleyans as well, in order to check for consistency of clustering between the two places, which by then were second- or third-generation congregations.

Table 6.8

	Fathers	Surnames	Repeaters	Repeat rate	Max instances
Newcastle Wes	270	197	50	2.46	4
Burslem Wes	265	198	36	2.86	6
Tunstall PM	270	179	46	2.98	10

Note 1: By chance, the number of baptismal fathers in the two Potteries circuits in the 1830s was almost identical (the 1820s numbers diverged significantly and are here excluded). In order to make for ease of comparisons, the last 270 unique fathers were analysed for Newcastle, which entailed excluding births before 1832.

Note 2: Results were calculated after first eliminating multiple appearances for the same parents and then allowing for variability in spelling, such as Shufflebotham-Shufflebottom, and Clowes-Clews-Clews. More dubious entries such as Charlesworth-Chesworth (appearing in the Tunstall registers) were treated as separate names.

Both, therefore, in the surname density and the pattern of peak incidence, the Prims would appear to have exhibited a greater degree of family association than the Wesleyans. Besides the case of 10 shared surnames, there were further instances of eight, six and five

common surnames; the Wesleyans by contrast managed one instance of six and another of four.

Finally, the Tunstall data give a further glimpse of the interaction of familial and workplace factors: of the 157 men with repeating surnames (totalling only 51 discrete names) that repeated over the entire 17-year currency of the registers, half (78) shared the same employment as their namesake. This analysis is, it must be admitted, no more than indicative. Yet it generally chimes with the evidence that emerged previously, and suggests that earlier writers may have tended to respond to the notorious, rather than the humdrum but typical, in discerning the character of the denomination.

LONGITUDINAL EFFECTS

The foregoing poses a problem. The 20th century Prims were indeed the working-class end of the Methodist spectrum, as oral testimony readily confirms. The present writer heard similar accounts from elderly officials and stalwarts of the movement across Cheshire and North Shropshire, in which the Wesleyans had the money, the status and the best china, whereas the Prims often had the members and the plain earthenware, and were driven unwillingly into congregation-level unification by their increasing inability to fund the fabric of their chapels.⁵⁸ Added to this, a starting assumption about 19th century Nonconformity is that it experienced growing social acceptability in part because its followers experienced progressive enrichment and social advancement through sober diligence, and that it was particularly pronounced among Methodists, whose faith was 'an

⁵⁸ In one particularly telling instance, an elderly neighbour named Wilmot Penlington observed that when he was a young Wesleyan, the Prims were regarded as 'very close to the Brethren'.

inner-worldly asceticism'.⁵⁹ It clearly applied to the Prims, who progressively acquired all of the accoutrements of a respectable denomination: theological colleges, boarding-schools, building society and insurance company.⁶⁰ These denominational advances of the late Victorian era no doubt reflected the parallel social advancement of existing Primitive Methodists. How is this to be reconciled with evidence of earlier higher status that is, no matter how persuasive, ultimately slender? A view of the movement as something other than a humble creation must therefore explain how it became the later church.

The scale of investigation required to examine this properly lies beyond that of the present research, but a strong pointer to how this came about emerges by tracking the changing social profile of baptismal parents in the post-1837 era. Transcriptions of registers are beginning to appear in genealogical sites; the standards of compilation vary, and the degree of completeness is always rather restricted, but the resource gain by being able to exploit others' transcription work is invaluable, even if the processing of incompatible formats was rather laborious. The choice of registers was determined by availability. Only three were found that offered material data that extended beyond 1837 through to the 1870s: St Ives, Cornwall; Briston, Norfolk; and Calverley, West Yorkshire.⁶¹ They contain upwards of 2500 parent sets (among about 4500-5000 actual baptisms), and the task of transcription and analysis alone would have consumed an unacceptable proportion of the resource budget for this research. Because start and finish dates did not align precisely, the analysis was split among the two core decades of the 1850s and 1860s, with the periods to 1849 and from 1870 covering between 5 and 15 years.⁶² When the lists were analysed thus, the

⁵⁹ Moore, *Pit-men, Preachers and Politics*, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Much of Kendall's second volume is occupied in tracing each of these innovations.

⁶¹ Since completing the thesis, another register has been discovered, but too late to be included.

⁶² Briston PM baptisms: www.freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~tinstaafl/Church_Pages/briston_prims.htm; Calverley Parish from: www.calverley.info/noncr.htm; St Ives PM baptisms: www.cornwall-opc-database.org/search-database/ (all downloaded on or before 15th Nov 2011). All provide permission for use for academic or family history purposes only.

proportion of non-manual fathers was as follows, with additionally an unweighted average of the three shown:

Table 6.9 Incidence of non-manual fathers in three circuit registers, 1840s-1870s

Non-Manual Social fraction	St Ives Fathers %	Calverley Fathers %	Briston Fathers %	Baptismal fathers %
To 1849	4.3	7.4	16.0	9.2
1850-59	5.4	5.3	13.1	7.9
1860-69	5.5	7.3	9.7	7.5
1870+	6.2	8.1	13.3	9.2

The pattern is not marked or consistent across the three circuits, with Briston bottoming out in the 1860s, Calverley in the 1850s, and St Ives rising throughout, although from a low base. Yet there are reasons to think that the St Ives result, as at Tunstall a generation earlier, may have been affected by selective self-exclusion. The skilled worker fraction figures there read 14.3%, 10.8%, 10.9% and 11.9%, and so the rise in the top strata was not underpinned by a corresponding rise among the skilled, which is counter-intuitive if the non-manual advance reflected a broadly-based rise in status across the congregation. In addition, the head chapel in the circuit, at Fore Street, was funded by six 'gentleman' members of the congregation, but none was prepared to act as trustee. If the same hesitancy to baptise their offspring applied initially, the apparent rise may reflect its declining influence, rather than any progressive social improvement.⁶³ The evidence is thus tentative in an absolute sense, but clear in failing to reflect the progressive improvement principle. It is consistent with the hypothesis that the later movement was less successful in attracting new blood among the more comfortably-off than it had been in its formative years; and that would support the view that the early Prims had built a movement that moved to match its rhetoric. It progressively turned away many of those with the money, leisure and activist commitment – in short, the people who had originally

⁶³ Source: C. Noall, *History of St Ives Fore Street Methodist Church (formerly Primitive Methodist), Ebenezer, St Ives, 1962* (chapel commemorative booklet, held at Englesea Brook Museum).

provided their impetus. The founders thereby condemned it to stasis that their successors could not break out from.

SUMMARY

Analysis of the baptismal registers in more depth calls for us to shift our perception of the character of the early Primitive Methodists. While they did not have access to the well-educated products of dissenting academies and Scottish universities that supplied the high-profile leaders of elite congregations of Independents, the notion of the inspired and ill-educated preacher seems to be overdone. The itinerants were literate (it had been a condition of the job from the start) and only one definite case of an illiterate lay preacher emerged among the baptisers in the home circuits of North Staffordshire – and he would soon acquire literacy. The fact that he performed one baptism as an illiterate undermines the case for arguing that there was a significant pool of illiterate males who were excused baptismal duties for that reason.

The Staffordshire results set out by Watts make it plain that in the county of origin, while the Prims recorded a much lower proportion of non-manual categories than the Wesleyans, they had a higher presence among the skilled. Furthermore, some of the poor results for the top social strata may reflect selective avoidance of the PM sacrament by its more prosperous followers, including some of its local preachers. The comparatively high literacy of the first PM parents offers a similarly poor fit with the modern image, and the patterns of affiliation by employment type in Newcastle-under-Lyme suggest that workplace affiliation was important; but so too was family preference, to judge both by individual name coincidences and the rather different profile of surname repeats. The

Chapter 6: The Baptismal Registers

image of the typical early Prim as an individual swimming against the family tide is not borne out. In the Potteries, at least, family was a key route to affiliation.

Furthermore, there are indications that the cadre of the earliest local preachers included some – and probably the more prosperous among their number – who continued to baptise their children in the Anglican tradition, thus depressing the presence of the self-employed and farmers in class analyses of baptismal registers. So, we are left with the image of a denomination that, in these earliest years, was patronised by the high end of the working class and buoyed up by family networks within it. They were more likely to be literate, and to occupy skilled jobs. Yet the denomination, far from advancing socially across the 19th century, went backwards despite self-enrichment among its existing followers: the conclusion that its recruitment profile fell is one that is supported by admittedly slender evidence from three circuits.

More research is needed to arrive at a more definitive reconciliation of the evidence here, but it seems to show that the Prims were not initially a church of the social margins, even if they increasingly came to be so. The remaining chapters will offer alternative data sources that can go some way towards doing this.

This chapter has two aims: first to use the evidence of the 1851 Religious Census to explore some of the key assertions about the origins and driving influences behind the growth of Primitive Methodism; and second to expose one distinctive aspect about the movement's chapel estate, its propinquity. Exposure to the chapel estate of the connexion in the counties of Cheshire and Shropshire in particular seemed to point to a physical pattern of chapels much closer together than those of larger competitors, and raised the question of whether more generally, and if so why, that was the case. It will leave to others reflections on the ambivalence among historians of religion about head-counting, and also most of the debate about methodology, which has been more than adequately covered by earlier writers.¹ The issues of estimating attenders, and how much the problem of missed venues impacted, cannot be ignored though: they form the preamble.

ATTENDANCE-ATTENDERS

Historians have struggled to agree a common approach to the problem of discerning attenders from raw attendance data.² The author of the original report, Horace Mann, added half of afternoon and one-third of evening totals to morning attendance figures ostensibly to discount multiple attendances, but not incidentally to ensure that the method could not favour Nonconformity. In the Prims' case, it succeeded only too well: according to Mann, the morning, afternoon and evening attendances were respectively 100,000, 176,000 and 235,000 (rounded); yet his formula computed the number of discrete attenders at only 266,000,³ not much higher than the result used by those historians who opted to use

¹ Most transcriptions discuss the Census methodology itself; Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, and Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, provide a wider examination of the implications, *passim*.

² Usefully surveyed in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 671-675.

³ Mann, *Religious Worship in England and Wales*, p. 110 provides the attendance numbers; this writer's application of his formula.

only the best-attended service total. Yet those historians who relied upon attendances as an analogue for attenders thus favoured 511,000, which was obviously too high. Some adjustment was clearly needed; but which one, and was it necessarily common to all places?

Margery Tranter concluded that multiple attendances were a smaller feature in Derbyshire and therefore used total attendances as an adequate representation of attenders.⁴ In her judgement, cross-attendance was a bigger factor in Derbyshire than repeat attendance at the same place of worship. Both arguments are difficult to sustain, if the village of Turnditch is representative. Despite its small size (380 total population in 1851, of whom about 190 can be assumed to be adults) it had three outlets, one Anglican (morning only, 54 attending), one PM (afternoon and evening, with 50 and 100 respectively) and one Independent (afternoon and evening, 50 each). The sum total of attendances was 304 and that of the best-attended service of each was 204. Given the irreducible number of the elderly, the sick, and those obliged by work commitments to miss attendance, the 150 who attended evening service represented virtually the entire available adult population. It suggests that although most morning Anglicans were evening repeaters, so too were the larger number of afternoon Nonconformists;⁵ and repeat attendance within the same Nonconformist denomination was, intuitively, more probable than cross-attendance between Prims and Congregationalists.

This example was chosen because its neighbours either had their own PM outlets, or one in a closer village than Turnditch. As such it was unlikely to have the foregoing results as a consequence of being a net importer of worshippers. The provision level in the local Dales area meant that few if any places there were beneficiaries of this. There might, however,

⁴ Tranter, *Derbyshire*, p. xxx.

⁵ Tranter, *Derbyshire*, pp. 83-4.

have been a form of cross-attendance not considered as an option: at different outlets of the same denomination. This is suggested by the case of three Derbyshire venues operated within a mile of each other at Upper Hackney (51 attenders, afternoon) and two at Matlock Bridge, the first of which met only once (69 attenders, afternoon), the other meeting twice, afternoon and evening with 114 and 175 attenders respectively (there was also a morning figure of 19, but this was probably a class). Even if every one of the 114 returned to evening service, it beggars belief that none of the other 61 was drawn from the nearby 120 whose chapel offered no evening service. This risk of cross-attendance *between* PM venues triggered examination of the propinquity issue discussed later.

The Mann approach has spawned at least two better variants: Edward Royle proposed to adjust the Mann formula by applying it to the best- then second-best and finally third- best attended services; Watts demurred, proposing to use a straight one-third fraction of all other services in addition to the most popular. In the PM case, the two differ by about 7.5%; and even though Professor Royle's approach seems intuitively more likely, prudence dictates that the Watts formula is chosen to reduce the risk of overstatement.

COMPLETENESS

Census sceptics took solace in the manifest problem of omissions in the returns, either because outlets were missed, or the returns were misfiled or mislaid. Recent orthodoxy had held that the scale of this did not significantly injure the general validity of the returns, until Clive Field's very thorough assessment of the scale of the problem in Shropshire, when he estimated that at least 40% of PM outlets and about 25% of PM worshippers were missed, observing that further searches might yet uncover more. The risk was plain enough in a single comment made in one return, signed by Richard Reynolds Pearce,

steward and leather dealer, who flagged up a missing '10 or 12 small congregations' within two miles of Dawley Lane, none of which were places named as omissions by Field.⁶ If one steward had alerted to this level of omission, perhaps the problem was even larger.

Yet the signatory to the other three venues in Dawley was a recent itinerant recruit, John Heath, who identified none.⁷ He lodged together with his circuit superintendent, Joseph Grieves, who however reported in the 1851 circuit returns that Heath's performance was entirely satisfactory; and since Grieves was the man who, uniquely among Shropshire returners, had identified and corrected seven other cases of overlooked venues it is unlikely that he would have failed to spot such an obvious error by Heath. (The returns also list all of the circuit venues, but fail to name a single omitted place within two miles of Dawley Lane.⁸) It is unlikely that both Heath and Grieves were negligent; so Pearce apparently flagged up a non-problem. Further examination of his entry, and those for the area around it, offers a possible explanation. The service pattern in Dawley was unusual, in that very few surrounding outlets offered afternoon services; where a second service was offered, it mainly took place in the morning. It is possible, therefore, that these 'small congregations' largely comprised members of one or other of the reported congregations, either meeting in classes, or undertaking independent initiatives of additional afternoon worship in private houses. The connexion would be well aware of them, but might not class them as worship venues. This would explain Heath's behaviour: he, better than Pearce, may have understood the status of those meetings and returned accordingly.

⁶ Field, *Shropshire*, entry no. 204.

⁷ *Ibid.*, entries 205-7.

⁸ Circuit report for 1851, submitted by Joseph Grieves, Circuit Superintendent, Shropshire Archives ref NM1861/7; William Leary, *Primitive Methodist Ministers and Their Stations from the Commencement to 1932*, Chester, 1981.

This does not invalidate the Field finding that about 25% of attendances were therefore probably missed in Shropshire's PM returns; but Pearce's entry also returns the focus to the issue of cross-attendance. He reported that numbers were down because some of the congregation had visited another nearby chapel. The preparedness to visit another outlet for reasons of added opportunity or, perhaps, variety was not necessarily restricted to the informal or the occasional. As discussed below, the geography of PM outlets made this highly feasible, and if it occurred, then Field's 25% of missed attendances might translate to a much lower level of missed *attenders*.

When, furthermore, four other counties' returns were analysed in comparison with Shropshire's, none reported the same scale of omission.⁹ Of course, that might simply be because they were not sought with Field's degree of thoroughness (and if so it would require a significant re-appraisal not just of Primitive Methodism, but of Methodism generally because his researches suggested that whereas the level of omissions in other returns were each around 4% of worshippers, the Methodist figure was six times higher). Yet extrapolation of Field's finding to national level indicates that it cannot be typical: Field estimated that the county accounted for 4.4% of England's PM worshippers on Census Sunday; which would imply about 6200 PM outlets, but the total was only around 4800-4900.¹⁰ Shropshire's omissions pattern may not be unique, but it was clearly not typical; and the national scale of impairment due to incomplete or inaccurate returns is probably much lower than a reading of Field's evidence in isolation would suggest. Overall therefore, there is no reason to believe that the PM returns were undertaken less thoroughly than any others. Furthermore, while extraction of useful data from the numbers

⁹ Derbyshire, East Riding, Lincolnshire and Norfolk.

¹⁰ From Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 456, the total of premises as at 1847 was 4671, and 240 purpose-built chapels – some replacements for rented premises – were added to the estate between then and 1851, according to Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 424. Furthermore, the published figures include Scottish, Welsh, US and colonial outlets, hence the estimate of 4800-4900 English chapels.

themselves requires considerable interpretive care, the Census will illuminate geographic patterns of adherence, and whether those map to others, such as the incidence of hardship, social dislocation, industrial depression or competitor disregard.

THE COLLATED NATIONAL RESULTS

The starting-point for further examination of these questions is the geographic variability on view at county level. The following table explains why previous writers have, explicitly or implicitly, claimed that the Prims were a predominantly rural movement appealing mainly to the unskilled;¹¹ yet it also shows the error of doing so.

Table 7.1: County PM worship density at 1851 (England average 1.95%):¹²

County	Worship Density	County	Worship Density
Norfolk	6.3	Northumberland	1.9
Derbyshire	5.6	Hampshire	1.8
Lincolnshire	5.3	Huntingdonshire	1.8
ERY	5.2	Cornwall	1.7
NRV	5.1	Dorset	1.7
Durham	4.7	Westmorland	1.6
Shropshire	4.7	Cumberland	1.4
Berkshire	4.1	Northamptonshire	1.1
Wiltshire	3.9	Lancashire	1.0
Nottinghamshire	3.7	Somerset	1.0
Cambridgeshire	3.6	Warwickshire	0.8
Buckinghamshire	3.6	Essex	0.8
Staffordshire	3.4	Hertfordshire	0.7
Leicestershire	3.1	Rutland	0.7
Bedfordshire	2.8	Gloucestershire	0.6
WRY	2.6	Kent	0.4
Cheshire	2.6	Sussex	0.2
Oxfordshire	2.3	London	0.1
Suffolk	2.2	Middlesex	0.1
Herefordshire	2.2	Surrey	0.02
Worcestershire	2.1	Devon ¹³	0.0

¹¹ Parsons, *RVB, Traditions*, p. 85; Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 1. Also on view in Werner, *History*, p 19. Local studies of Prims have been largely confined to rural areas: Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*; Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989; and more recently, Kate Tiller, 'The Desert begins to Blossom: Oxfordshire and Primitive Methodism, 1824-1860' in *Oxoniensia*, 2006, vol LXXI, p 85ff.

¹² Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, table XIV, pp. 682-712. All subsequent local results in this chapter are taken from that source unless otherwise stated.

Rural counties dominated by agricultural labourers may have occupied first and third positions, but more industrialised counties formed six of the top 10, while rural counties took seven of the bottom 10 places. Those counties adjacent to and including metropolitan London, running clockwise from Hertfordshire to Surrey and Sussex were particularly weak venues, whereas those from Wiltshire through Oxfordshire, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire were all above-average. Similarly Durham, the three Ridings, the three East Midlands counties, Staffordshire and Shropshire formed a crescent-shaped industrial backbone in comparison with which the more southerly counties of the Severn valley and the south-west were weak-to-moderate, while Cheshire sat between the areas of strong affiliation to the south and the rest of north-west England plus Northumberland which were weak to poor. So there was no simple urban-rural or north-south divide. Some other factors were at work.

The Prims credited much of their success to the paradoxical impact of official hostility. Yet the three counties where there are reports of preachers being substantively jailed twice are Oxfordshire, Lancashire and Kent, and they occupy 18th, 30th and 37th places in descending order of PM worship density; while six of the top 10 counties feature no reported case of prosecution of a preacher, successful or otherwise. In Lincolnshire, the site of the first detention, it would be hard to argue the hostility effect: the county may have been an outstanding success, but not in Grantham, the place where Wedgwood was jailed.¹⁴

¹³ It is unclear whether this is a data error. The movement would have a significant local presence in and around Plymouth soon after this date.

¹⁴ Grantham was the fourth-lowest Lincolnshire district, at 2.5% density – less than half the county average: Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 704.

Historians have generally preferred more sociological explanations, such as the 'closed village' argument in rural counties.¹⁵ Nonconformity did poorly in closed villages, but they were usually very poor prospects anyway: they much more often had an Anglican church and the landowners managed population levels, so that population growth ended up in open villages and towns. So too did the independent artisans to whom the Nonconformists appealed so strongly.¹⁶ It would have been quixotic (and in the Prims' case economically impossible) to keep failing to conquer non-existent prospects in closed villages when open villages had so many.

Similarly, the urban results are routinely held to reflect the godlessness of the Victorian City (and the associated myth of the urban crime-wave). It was taken by contemporaries to be a fact, and it became a commonplace that religion lacked saliency for the industrial poor, and/or they had lost or never possessed the social presumption to churchgoing.¹⁷ Yet the data do not confirm this, and Gilbert's point is crucial here: the Victorian city was often ill-served by Anglicanism.¹⁸ Nottingham, cited by him and others, is a case in point: it may have sat 90th of 99 Midlands registration districts in terms of its Anglican worship density as measured by the Census, but sat 34 places higher in terms of overall worship density; and its PM density 14 places higher still.¹⁹ The paradox is why the godlessness claim seems to be borne out in the largest conurbations. The Prims – and others – did not fail in London, for example, through lack of effort, yet a demand-driven explanation is hard to sustain: why should Nottingham's urban poor be so much readier to adhere to Primitive Methodism than their rural counterparts in many (but not all) English counties

¹⁵ Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society*, pp. 10-14; Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, pp. 56-60.

¹⁶ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, Table 3.1, p. 63.

¹⁷ This indeed was the sub-text of Mann's census: although not his most ringing phrase, his observation (Mann, *Religious Worship*, p. 63) is telling: 'The masses...of our large and growing towns – connected by no sympathetic tie with those by fortune placed above them – form a world apart, a nation by themselves...'

¹⁸ Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 110.

¹⁹ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 704-707.

while the poor in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool were so resistant? The problem was lack of response, not lack of effort; but perhaps that nonetheless reflected the *nature* of the supply, rather than its quantity. It is useful to reflect upon how Prim expansion effort worked.

When results are scrutinised in more detail, it is plain that local variability was at least as pronounced as at county-level: for example, Newbury's PM affiliation level was 20 times higher than Abingdon's. The Prims operated a system of largely freelance breaking of new ground: one or more itinerants would be freed from circuit responsibilities, and dispatched with little more than a collection of publications and an instruction to recruit souls. The circuit expected the preachers to be self-financing from pamphlet sales, and expected a return on the material as well; it made both those in charge and those on the road particularly responsive to results. That is why Wiltshire was missioned so early: Shrewsbury had spare preaching resources which were turned to mission but met with a poor response in mid-Wales; so rather than recall their preacher, he was sent further south and east.²⁰ The process of creeping penetration ran out of steam as it neared London.

Their Thames valley success reflects this flexibility which made the Prims very effective at penetrating new areas; and since it was a strategy unavailable to denominations that thought in terms of pastoral effort being delivered by the religious professionals either alone or only under their oversight and tutelage, the Prims had a decided edge in areas of low population density. That applied, though, only when the territory was successfully missioned in the first place, and the denomination's follow-up was successful. Doubtless there were instances of demand suppression, such as the few notorious cases of elite

²⁰ Petty, *History*, 1860, p. 179.

pressurising of the mass of the people, but the insistent pattern of re-missioning shows that missionary or pastoral failure was commonplace.²¹

This though was not how matters appeared to the Prims – and they monopolised the recording of such matters. Rural failures were woven into the adversity discourse, blamed on hostile squires, mobs and parsons; rural successes were taken to show something of the movement's humble character. The resulting narrative appears vindicated by the plethora of small country chapels; but as will be discussed later this reflected their outreach behaviour, not their rural focus: in the above table, rural counties together accounted for only 36% of PM worshippers in 1851. A fairer characterisation of the connexion is that it was essentially *provincial*, or anti-metropolitan, in character. It remained so to the end, failing to become the twentieth-century urban church that the modernisers wanted it to be.

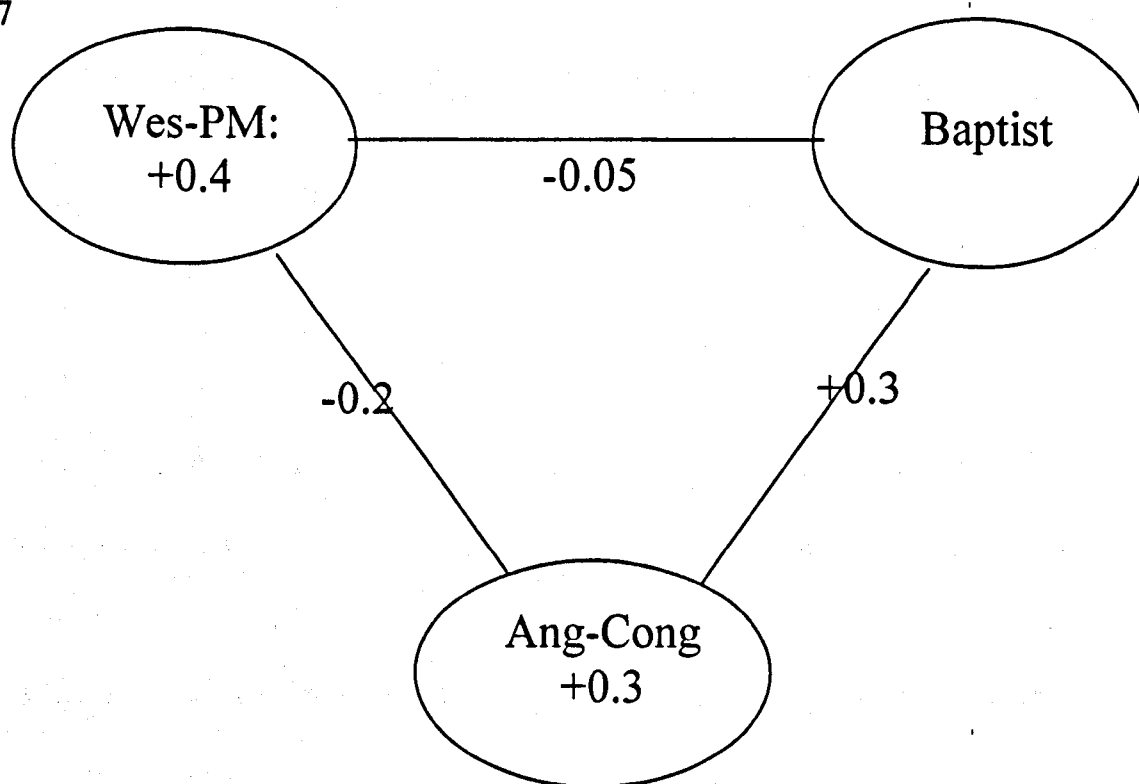
THE CORRELATION APPROACH

Michael Watts' data have much more to offer, but in terms of the development of the argument it is useful to change tack at this point to consider what may be gleaned by employing statistical correlation techniques, something he generally did not do. That was the approach adopted five years later in *Rival Jerusalems*, in order to expose patterns that had hitherto been less clearly recognised. These offer important insights into Watts' findings. One important caveat though is the risk of logical error by inviting calculation first and hypothesis conveniently second. The method should test, and works most securely when it disproves, a prior hypothesis.

²¹ There are about ten references to re-missioning in Kendall, including one instance of serial efforts required to establish causes: Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 531.

In the case of the Prims, existing hypotheses are firstly that the denomination succeeded opportunistically, either because it sought out groups ignored by competitors (Thompson), because its lower-cost mission enabled it to operate in marginal communities (Werner), or because it was particularly sympathetic to the existing belief systems of the rural poor (Ambler). A more pointed hypothesis was that it succeeded specifically at Wesleyan expense (Thompson and Werner). Figure 7 groups the best-patronised Protestant denominations in Victorian England into three sets based on the (rounded) correlations between them.

Figure 7



Anglicans, Baptists and Congregationalists correlated positively with one another at about the same intensity. Methodists, however, correlated negatively (and more modestly) with Anglicanism, closely followed by Congregationalists, but hardly at all with the Baptists.²² If Methodism benefited from an opportunistic effect therefore, it was modest. But the results confound the image of the populist and brash young movement appealing to a significantly wider spectrum of England's masses. That would have produced markedly

²² Snell & Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, table 6.1, p. 190.

higher negative correlations than its Wesleyan competitor: instead, it was marginally lower in relation to both Anglicans and Congregationalists. Meanwhile, the claim that the Prims prospered at the expense of Wesleyanism is simply wrong: they correlated more strongly than any other pair of movements, whether positively or negatively. So both the Thompson view of the Prims as a subversive class-driven counter to Wesleyanism, and Werner's that it was Wesleyan failures in the few years between Waterloo and Peterloo, owe more to contemporary rhetoric (and subsequent discourse) than to numerical reality.²³ Snell and Ell's work suggests that the pursuit of competitive aspects is unlikely to deliver fresh insights into the sources of PM success. By contrast, the Watts approach suggests that three other predisposing factors might do so.

UNSKILLED EMPLOYMENT

A high incidence of the unskilled in the workforce is a marker both for low levels of urbanisation-industrialisation and for high risk of economic hardship: both are claimed causal factors predisposing the Prims to succeed. The table overleaf ranks counties' PM worship density by declining unskilled incidence. While the results form a spectrum, there are two clusters which appear to be both socially and numerically coherent. First a group of predominantly rural counties feature an unskilled incidence between 49% and 59%; then a second group of predominantly industrial ones is concentrated between 26% and 33%. Two more industrial counties lie at the extreme of the spectrum, around the 20-22% mark, leaving seven unaccounted for. They are neither highly industrialised nor highly rural, and their host incidence of the unskilled ranges from 38-44%, too detached to be confidently placed with either of the other two groups.

²³ Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp 396-7; Werner, *History*, passim, but esp. pp. 13, 19.

Table 7.2: Incidence of unskilled workers compared with PM worship densities.²⁴

County	Unskilled %	PM Worship Density	County	Unskilled %	PM Worship Density
Beds	59.2	2.8	Somerset	43.5	1.0
Essex	59.0	0.8	Shropshire	42.7	4.7
Bucks	56.8	3.6	N Yorks	39.1	5.1
Herts	55.7	0.7	Gloucs	38.7	0.6
Hunt	55.4	1.8	Worcs	37.6	2.1
Berks	54.4	4.1	Nthum	33.6	1.9
Wilts	54.2	3.9	Surrey	33.1	0.0
Cambs	54.2	3.6	Cornwall	32.4	1.7
Suffolk	54.0	2.2	Westmor	32.4	1.6
Sussex	53.3	0.2	Leics/Rutland	32.2	2.9
Hants	53.0	1.8	Cheshire	32.0	2.6
Hereford	52.0	2.2	Cumberland	31.5	1.4
Lincs	52.0	5.3	Derbys	30.5	5.6
Kent	51.8	0.4	Notts	30.9	3.7
Oxon	50.9	2.3	Warks	28.7	0.8
Dorset	50.1	1.7	Staffs	27.3	3.4
Norfolk	49.3	6.3	Durham	27.2	4.7
Nhants	49.0	1.1	London/Middx	26.1	0.1
E Yorks	44.3	5.2	Lancs	22.4	1.0
Devon	43.8	0.0	W Yorks	19.8	2.6

The weighted worship densities of these three groups are 2.6%, 2.6% and 1.7% respectively, but these do not qualify as even modest confirmation that declining affiliation was an urban problem: if the coefficient of correlation (Spearman rank) between the unskilled incidence and worship densities is calculated, the result is 0.105, a negligible result that cannot support the claim. There is a pattern here – hence the seductively high showing in several rural counties – but it is not urban-rural. It is the effect of poor showings in the very largest cities, an issue touched upon already. The overall ‘industrial’ result was depressed because in a very few of the largest centres the connexion struggled to hit 1%.²⁵ The clusters of districts comprising Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London,

²⁴ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995; tables XV-LIV, pp. 717-777.

²⁵ It might usefully be noted, too, that these were the centres that most benefitted from rural migration and so might be expected to have had imported demand as a result.

Manchester, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne stood out.²⁶ There were some differences, though: while all satellite towns around London, Manchester and Liverpool were similarly poor centres of PM presence, this was true of only some of Birmingham's and Newcastle's, and none of Leeds', neighbours. Its performance (1%), though, was all the more remarkable because the West Riding was otherwise (errors and lost data apart) a hotspot for the connexion, and is perhaps to be accounted for in that it is geographically extensive, and its neighbours, especially Bradford, were not satellites but independent centres. This suggested that London's pattern was perhaps more pronounced, but not unique: outer neighbours were being 'contaminated' by the PM failure in the centre, whereas independent centres beyond its reach, such as Reading, were not.

Stephen Yeo's work on the Berkshire town suggested a possible mechanism to explain this sharp distinction between a few very large centres immune to the Prims and most centres, even large ones, more welcoming than the English average.²⁷ Communal separation by class arrived very late in Reading, with sustained civic efforts by the entrepreneurial families of the town, whereas in London's East End it was long-established.²⁸ One commentator giving evidence to an 1860s Commons Select Committee observed that 'the evil condition of the [East End] population is rather owing to the total absence of residents of a better class...than to anything else'.²⁹ This pre-dated the arrival of improved travel methods: by 1845, Bromley, previously a Kentish market-town, was already home to up to 100 'gentleman's seats and villa residences' of London business people, before it was served by rail. It was symptomatic of a general pattern: the elite had largely fled the poorer

²⁶ Watts' analysis shows both Bristol and Sheffield at zero, but this is surely a data error, as Sheffield was an early centre of PM activity (the Reverend Thomas Holliday was recruited there around 1820) and Bristol's earliest congregation was in the 1830s.

²⁷ Stephen Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organisations in Crisis*, London, 1976, p. 29ff.

²⁸ Harold Dyos and David Reeder, 'Slums and Suburbs' in Harold Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds, *The Victorian City: Images and Realities (2 Vols)*, London, 1973, vol 1, p. 370ff.

²⁹ The evidence of Edward Denison, an Oxbridge graduate involved in philanthropic efforts on his return from overseas, cited by Peter Keating, 'Fact and Fiction in the East End' in *The Victorian City* vol. 2, p. 591.

parts of London long before; the most prosperous in business had followed by mid-century; and if the experience of Chislehurst was typical, the next tier – the comfortably-placed workforce – exploited the new transport options to do likewise. Its rail service was established around that time, and witnessed a tenfold growth in passenger revenues in the early 1850s.³⁰ By 1867, even though both rail and horse-drawn trams were beyond the financial reach of the majority for regular travel, Londoners each averaged 22.7 journeys per annum. The age of the middle-class commuter was well established even then – but only in metropolitan centres.³¹ The resulting distances involved in these conurbations stretched and often broke the social ties between local communities and those elites, who provided the organisational clout as well as the time for administration needed for all voluntary organisations. The churches responded either by appealing to the defectors to maintain their former congregational commitments, or by temporary transplants of activists in City Missions such as Toynbee Hall. Initially, the PM newcomers were less able to do either and so they were particularly ill-fitted to mission areas where social stratification by geography was already a factor.³² Clearly, some such handicap was present, because the PM city failure was entrenched, despite huge investment of effort, and despite what might be imagined to be a drip-feed of potential support in the shape of rural-to-urban migration by PM adherents.³³ The results were therefore re-cast by extracting the results for Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, plus any contiguous districts exhibiting very poor results, placing them in a separate category.

³⁰ J. Rawcliffe, 'Bromley: Kentish Market Town to London Suburb, 1841-1881' in Francis Thompson, *The Rise of Suburbia*, Leicester, 1982.

³¹ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: a Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society*, Oxford, 1971, p. 234.

³² Although four decades later, it was a different story, with active missioning in the East End and elsewhere: Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 507ff.

³³ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, pp. 249-258 gives a lengthy account of the movement's travails in London: visited in 1810; missioned in 1811; with congregations by 1817, but collapse before 1822; re-missioning and further failed attempts to establish a local structure in 1823; the dispatch of William Clowes for a 20-month period in 1824-25; his return in 1835 following the decay of the movement's circuit machinery; and he was succeeded by John Flesher; but despite the dedication of its two best preachers, the Connexion had to sell its only London chapel in 1837 to clear its debts.

Many of them were not, at that time, ‘metropolitan’, but the label is intended to denote that they appear to have been commonly depressed in some socially and geographically significant manner. The results are as follows:³⁴

Table 7.3: PM worship density by county type

County/District type	Population 000s	PM worship density	Share of PM total
Rural	4454	2.6	35.5
Mixed	1828	2.6	14.5
Prov-Industrial	5145	2.8	44.2
‘Metropolitan’	4792	0.4	5.8

Note: Bristol and Sheffield were excluded as data errors. A case still might have been made for Bristol, given that it was unlikely to out-perform neighbouring Clifton at 0.6%; but the two together could not be treated as a ‘metropolitan’ area because the county result was low anyway.

Surprisingly, away from ‘metropolitan’ influences, urbanisation had a modest *positive* impact on PM chances of success – although the incidence of large centres with values higher than 2.8% worship density suggests that even more subtle factors were in operation. The overall result not only confounds the general view; it does not accord with the stated findings of Snell and Ell, whose assessment of the impact of urbanisation stated that of the 21 denominations classified, the Prims stood sixth-worst in urban performance.³⁵ This correlation was applied at registration district level, the only basis upon which a full national analysis was mounted. Yet in their sub-set of 11 English counties, a similar exercise repeated at parish level reversed the finding.³⁶ A correlation with population growth found the Prims sixth-best, that with population density found them ninth-best.

³⁴ In addition to London and Middlesex districts, the ‘metropolitan’ districts were as follows: Altrincham, Aston, Ashton-under-Lyne, Barton-on-Irwell, Birmingham, Bolton, Bromley, Bury, Castle Ward, Chorlton, Croydon, Dartford, Epping, Kingston-on-Thames, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Oldham, Ongar, Prescot, Richmond, Rochdale, Romford, Runcorn, Salford, Stockport, West Derby, West Ham, and Wirral.

³⁵ Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 398; claim based on correlation coefficients, p. 397, and excludes the United Presbyterian Synod, a minnow that was poorer as well.

³⁶ Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Dorset, the East Riding, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Northumberland, Rutland, Suffolk and Sussex.

Such anomalous results invite distrust, but detailed consideration indicates that they are not incompatible. Metropolitan parishes form a small proportion of England's total, but the districts are 10% of the national number; and so their poor metropolitan performance was more significant at district than at parish level. Similarly, when the criterion was the rates of growth of the host communities, the Prims' nimbleness in many industrial villages swamped their problems in the few metropolitan areas. The results, in other words, are more influenced by the measures chosen than by what they seek to measure.

ILLITERACY

Watts used illiteracy as another marker for hardship. He asserted, based on examples, that there is a clear link between its incidence and the level of Nonconformist affiliation; the coefficient of correlation at county level was +0.273. This is not strong, but exceeds that for Anglican weakness, and is much stronger than that for the incidence of unskilled. Yet the Potteries result (Chapter 6) directs attention to the need for caution, and regional breakdowns confirm that: while Southern counties had higher results typically around +0.36, Midland and Northern ones were under +0.10. If however poverty were the underlying causal factor manifested in illiteracy, it should show up even more prominently at District level, because even poorer counties had patches of significantly wealthier communities. In fact it did not: the coefficient between illiteracy and PM worship density fell to +0.210.³⁷ Poverty, it seems, was not the core problem; the Potteries result was not anomalous; and the reasons for the southern results must be sought elsewhere. The basis of district-level allocations used to highlight the 'metropolitan' effect was adopted, but the anomalous result for the 82 districts comprising the 'mixed' counties (-0.190) indicated the

³⁷ The levels of illiteracy and PM attendance percentages were transcribed for each of the 557 districts (excluding the erroneous results for Sheffield and Bristol, and the nulls for Devon) as listed in English counties in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, table XIV. Spearman rank correlations were derived for all districts, then for each of the sets in turn.

inappropriateness of this as a coherent grouping. These had been treated thus not because of any commonality of character or structure, but because they were neither unskilled enough to include in agrarian counties, nor skilled enough to be classed as industrial. While none was highly industrialised – hence the intermediate level of unskilled workers – the three West Country counties (Somerset, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire) had low-intensity widely distributed non-agricultural employments and retained their rural character, whereas Shropshire and the two Ridings had a small number of intensive centres of industrialisation. Accordingly, the former were placed in the rural category and the latter added to ‘provincial/industrial’, and the correlations reworked. This produced a ‘cleaned-up’ result that allowed attention to focus on the substantive finding:

Table 7.4

District type	Correlation between illiteracy and PM worship density
Metropolitan	+0.625
Provincial/Industrial (modified)	+0.033
Rural (modified)	+0.267
ENGLAND	+0.210

On this evidence, illiteracy may have been a modest marker for hardship in rural areas but not urban ones; and it is very unlikely that a factor inoperative in most urban areas was a significant one in the ‘metropolitan’ ones. More probably, these were the areas most affected by communal separation by class; and illiteracy was a marker for that rather than poverty per se. The rural uncertainty adds to the saliency of the question of whether a third potential marker for hardship, the incidence of depressed workers, is relevant.

SOCIAL DISLOCATION

Workers in depressed industries suffered the consequences of industrial and technological dislocation, and anecdotal evidence holds that they were important reservoirs of

Nonconformist support. The evidence is available in Watts' data tables, but obscured by the wealth of other material in his multi-denominational analysis. They have been extracted in the table below. There does appear to be some pattern of association – particularly in the East Midlands – and this no doubt bolstered confidence in Thompson's view that a 'chiliasm of despair' was the causal link here. Yet the figures indicate otherwise. The top quartile had about five times as many depressed workers as the second, but its worship density was over a quarter lower. This is reflected in the coefficient of correlation between the two – a low but positive 0.107, when calculated nationally.³⁸

Table 7.5 PM Worship: County results ranked by Depressed Worker Incidence.

County	Host % Depressed	Worship density	County	Host % Depressed	Worship density
Leics/Rutland	21.7	2.9	Devon	1.2	0
Yorks - W	18.4	2.6	London/Middx	1.0	0.1
Notts	17.0	3.7	Nthum	0.9	1.9
Lancs	13.4	1.0	Dorset	0.9	1.7
Cheshire	12.6	2.6	Essex	0.8	0.8
Derbys	12.1	5.6	Berks	0.8	4.1
Worcs	9.7	2.1	Suff	0.8	2.2
Westmor	6.8	1.6	Yorks - E	0.7	5.2
Cumberland	6.4	1.4	Herts	0.6	0.7
Warks	6.0	0.8	Beds	0.5	2.8
Wilts	5.0	3.9	Hereford	0.5	2.2
Gloucs	3.6	0.6	Surrey	0.4	0.02
Norfolk	3.1	6.3	Cornwall	0.4	1.7
Staffs	3.0	3.4	Bucks	0.3	3.6
Salop	2.2	4.7	Lincs	0.3	5.3
Somerset	2.1	1.0	Hunt	0.2	1.8
Durham	1.5	4.7	Hants	0.2	1.8
Yorks - N	1.4	5.1	Cambs	0.1	3.6
Oxon	1.4	2.3	Suss	0.1	0.2
Nhants	1.3	1.1	Kent	0.1	0.4

³⁸ Devon excluded as a null.

Chapter 7: The 1851 Religious Census

Note: It was necessary to assign a value for WRY, because Watts cited only the sum of 'depressed' and the semi-skilled. By inspection of the Nonconformist results on view, the two groups appeared to be about evenly-matched.

The foregoing strands can be pulled together by tabulating the correlations contained in or derived from the Watts and Snell and Ell datasets. The results, first nationally and then for the Northern counties, for those factors susceptible to analysis by regional fractions, were as follows, in descending order of magnitude.

Table 7.6

Correlation between PM and:	Measured at	Source	National	Northern
Wesleyan density	District	Snell/Ell	+0.426	+0.682
Illiteracy	District	Watts	+0.210	+0.064
Anglicanism	District	Snell/Ell	-0.194	-0.075
Congregationalism	District	Snell/Ell	-0.159	+0.021
Depressed workers	County	Watts	+0.107	-0.112
Unskilled workers	County	Watts	+0.105	+0.055
Baptists	District	Snell/Ell	-0.043	+0.034

Note: The Northern counties were chosen because they were the only region in which the boundaries coincided between the two datasets.

The sole statistically significant result is that the hypothesised Prim-Wesleyan negative correlation was decisively disproved: the two movements tended to prosper or struggle in unison. As to the remainder, it would appear that none of the expected competitive or attractant factors was important, and three of them – the appeal to depressed and unskilled workers, and the opportunistic effect of Baptists – were effectively inoperative. These conclusions are reinforced by the Northern results in which all factors except Wesleyan presence were negligible.

At this date then, the Prims were not a predominantly rural movement. Nor were they disproportionately appealing to workers in depressed industries, one group who might have embraced their legends of hardship, except possibly in the East Midlands. Indeed, the

pattern of adherence suggests that any causal linkages with urbanisation and social dislocation are likely to have been fairly complex. However their success in the North, where so many new industrial communities were either under-served or ignored by older competitors, was not materially influenced by the patterns of competitive presence; nor was it based on the most marginalised. Meanwhile the illiteracy finding for the metropolitan districts gives support to the hypothesis that PM failures there were a function of geographic zoning by class. The abandoning of the Victorian city hit the populist late-comer Prims particularly hard. They failed to get a foothold in prosperous communities for image reasons, and they did not have the accumulated loyalty of previous generations who either remained in the inner city, or maintained worship links even after they moved out. By contrast, the connexion exhibited a curious patchwork outside the metropolitan areas, with small nodes of intense presence, both in worship density and premises, amid areas of virtual absence – and it is to its impact that interest now turns.

PROPINQUITY

Chapter 8 deals with the physical character of the PM estate. Here, the focus is on the geographic relationship between venues. Inspection appeared to show that, for comparable levels of worship density, Prim chapels stood closer to one another than did those of competitors. One obvious explanation is that a poor movement attracting people who lived in small villages would naturally produce a dense network of small cottage-based outlets, and that these would predispose the locations and distribution of dedicated replacements. Yet the Census, by recording the dates of chapel openings, shows that this is not what happened, both in specific instances across several counties, and via propinquity calculations enabled by the data.

Chapter 7: The 1851 Religious Census

The pattern in Lincolnshire is the earliest on view: the average capacity of pre-1851 chapels was under 150. They included only three chapels with capacity for over 500, with build dates in 1819, 1821, and 1826 (two further chapels opened in 1837 and 1849 accommodated 500 each).³⁹ Indeed the first four chapels to open – all in 1819, within a year or two of the county first being missioned – averaged 290 capacity, which was twice the average of all later chapels opened by them up to 1851. As an aside, it is inconceivable that a poor movement of fewer than 4000 members nationally could have found the means to add capacity for over 2000 people in only two counties in that year; but the Prims did.⁴⁰ The subsequent local development pattern around the largest of those 1819 chapels is instructive. Owston Ferry (pop. 1693 in 1851), as the name suggests, stands on the banks of the Trent, about two miles from Haxey (three hamlets, combined pop. 2129), and three miles from Epworth (pop. 1944). Its chapel had capacity for 630 worshippers; Epworth's opened two years later, with capacity for another 320, together exceeding the local demand in 1851. Yet the connexion opened another three chapels, one in each of Haxey's hamlets, in 1825, 1835 and 1836. All three were overcrowded on Census Sunday, while the larger chapels were between half and two-thirds full. This pattern was repeated elsewhere: a few miles away across the Trent, both Gainsborough and Scotter had three chapels by 1851, while a further six locations in the county had to make do with two, and finally ten more had other dedicated chapels in adjacent villages within two miles. So the character of the Lincolnshire PM presence was not one of a thin spread in rural backwaters, starting small and struggling to grow: it was a set of densely-served islands created by a process of leap-frogging. In this case, they began with a large chapel and spun off small ones.

³⁹ Ambler, *Lincolnshire*, 1979, chapels nos. 1392, 1103, 989, 1449 and 1421 respectively.

⁴⁰ In addition to the four Lincolnshire chapels (*Ibid.*, 1296, 1392, 1425 and 1444), the movement added another two in East Yorkshire (Wolffe, *East Riding*, chapels nos. 277 and 430).

The pattern was repeated in the area around Wrockwardine Wood and Oakengates in Shropshire. Both had 500-seater chapels, the earlier dating from 1822. Both were under-occupied on Census Sunday, but were surrounded by a further 30 chapels and cottage venues within a five-mile radius, the nearest of which (at Donnington) was half a mile from Wrockwardine; and several of these smaller venues were overcrowded. This pattern of larger, dedicated, but under-occupied chapels surrounded by venues within easy reach, some of them crowded, and many of them opened later, can hardly have been the product of central policy in a relatively poor movement. Even with spare capacity in their chapels, the connexion not only retained existing cottage venues but also continued to build further small local chapels within what, for competitors, would have been regarded as the catchment area of the existing ones.

A Derbyshire example not only confirms the frequency of this pattern, but also the denominational distinctiveness of it. In 1851, the population density of the Dales (home to Turnditch, cited earlier) was about half the county average – and much in line with that in Lincolnshire and Shropshire – at around 160 to the square mile.⁴¹ It was a location with higher Wesleyan than PM affiliation; yet within a circle of five miles radius around Wirksworth, it had no fewer than 23 places, two more than the Wesleyans. All but three were purpose-built chapels, and 14 of them had a seating capacity of 140 or fewer. The average catchment of 1.04 miles ought, by rational economic standards, to have been unaffordable, and the heavy price to be paid, both in increased build costs and added preacher and administrative resources, produced a minor gain viewed objectively: only 10 chapels would have been required to cover the area at an average catchment of about 1.5 miles, which would have placed virtually everyone within a mile of one outlet, and a few within a two-mile range of two.

⁴¹ This writer's calculation, based on 1851 district-level populations as cited by Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995 (Table XIV, page 706), and the area of the modern local authority that roughly maps to them.

Chapter 7: The 1851 Religious Census

A final example, not restricted to the 1851 cut-off, shows that the behaviour was sustained, in rural South Cheshire at least. The old roads to Chester from the south are those from Whitchurch and Nantwich, and as they converge they enclose a rural area centred upon the Peckforton Hills. Apart from the towns of Malpas and Tarporley, which stand on those old roads and had 1851 populations of around 1000, the remainder of the area comprises small settlements of around 250-500 population at that date. The midpoint between the two towns roughly coincides with a small PM chapel at Bulkeley. The three main denominations in the late Victorian period were Anglicans (15 outlets), Wesleyans (10) and Primitive Methodists (19), but the geography of provision differed substantially. The chapels (excluding private chapels and those built after 1880) averaged 4.3, 4.5 and 3.4 miles respectively from the centre point; and when zoned in two-mile bands the reason is clear enough.

Table 7.7 Religious Provision in South-West Cheshire, as measured from Bulkeley (Grid reference SJ532545).

No of chapels within	Primitive	Wesleyan	Anglican
0-2 miles	3	0	2
2-4 miles	11	3	2
4-6 miles	6	7	11

As the location map demonstrates, all three had provision across the area; but while the Anglicans had few churches on the higher ground, and the Wesleyans were content to serve the area from larger low-ground settlements, the Prims maintained a density of provision that was clearly not determined by economic considerations: even here, the typical worshipper was within one mile of a Prim chapel.

The insistence of this pattern across these four areas, which was far from optimal in terms of cost or preacher resources, indicates that the denomination was unable to resist

members' demand for local provision; and immobility is an unlikely explanation for that demand. The previously cited example of Dawley had a parallel in Derbyshire: when Borrowash chapel opened in Derbyshire (on the 30th March 1851) two PM chapels, one and three miles distant, abandoned their evening services to support the opening event there.⁴² And as both the Wirksworth and Bulkeley cases show, competitors did not act in this way. This had important consequences for the number and the average sizes of PM chapels: the movement tended to end up with estates of smaller outlets, and by focusing spend on new outlets rather than upgrading and extending existing ones, pathfinder outlets looked older, plainer and cheaper.

Two other aspects flow from these examples, however. First, there is little suggestion here that cottage venues inflated the numbers of outlets (which might have appeared possible, in that they were cheap). Derbyshire's pattern applied despite its high incidence of dedicated premises, and Wrockwardine Wood circuit failed to trim its outlet numbers materially as it progressively added to its stock of dedicated chapels after 1851.⁴³ The nine purpose-built chapels of 1850, the largest of which, Wrockwardine itself, was opened in 1822, had risen, twenty years later, to 19.

Second, the pattern is accentuated by the issue of differential survival. At the date of writing, four of the South Cheshire PM chapels featured above still exist as working country churches (three more are converted to pretty cottages) whereas none of the Wesleyan ones in the area survive. Meanwhile in the larger surrounding villages, the reverse applies: the PM outlets are long gone whereas the Wesleyan outlets are either still operational or survive in another guise. Inspection therefore indicates that the Prims were the church of small villages, and the Wesleyans that of the country town; yet it is a fallacy

⁴² Borrowash, Ockbrook and Spondon chapels; Tranter, *Derbyshire*, pp. 63-65.

⁴³ Wrockwardine Wood annual circuit returns for 1850 and 1851: Shropshire archives, NM1861/6-7.

caused by the differing strategies of two movements targeting the same areas, and the opposing fates of PM and WM chapels in larger and smaller locations. These results might, however, reflect (unconscious) cherry-picking. In order to eliminate that risk, three counties were selected which offered not only large samples of PM outlets at 1851, but also spanned a range of community types and PM provision as follows:

Table 7.8

County	% Unskilled	Venues	% Dedicated	% Worship Density
Derbyshire	30.5%	130	79%	5.6%
Shropshire	42.7%	257	29%	4.7%
Lincolnshire	52.0%	217	74%	5.3%

Note: Although the Census identified only 158 PM places of worship in Shropshire, the entry above includes all of the places recognised by Clive Field, other than 14 not confidently located.

The mean distance of each PM chapel from its nearest neighbour reflects the degree of propinquity in its estate, and this can be contrasted both from place to place and for competing denominations within the same geography. It was calculated by allocating an eight-digit national grid reference to every listed outlet identified in the Census, then using Pythagoras to calculate the linear interval. Allowing that the results omit some 5% of uncertainly located Shropshire venues, they were as follows, in statute miles:

Table 7.9

County	Derbyshire	Lincolnshire	Shropshire
Mean dist. to nearest neighbour	1.33	1.93	1.25

These results could only be achieved by clustering: in Derbyshire for example, 130 outlets randomly distributed across the county would have resulted in a mean distance in excess of three miles. It meant that in areas of PM presence in the county, the typical individual was not more than 0.67 miles from a PM outlet, rather than 1.57 miles; and it also meant that

the Prims broadly matched the Wesleyans in areas where they were present, despite having a third fewer outlets.⁴⁴

The specific examples suggested that propinquity was independent of the type of venue, a pivotal point in understanding the pattern. Since Shropshire and Derbyshire were so different in this respect (29% and 79% dedicated respectively), this was readily verifiable:

Table 7.10

Neighbouring outlets of Shropshire Preaching Places (% of 257 analysed)				
Within	f=1+	f=2+	f=3+	f=4+
0.5 miles	14.0	1.9	0.4	0.4
1 mile	35.8	16.3	7.0	3.5
1.5 miles	71.6	47.9	24.1	10.9
2 miles	88.3	72.8	54.1	35.0

Table 7.11

Neighbouring outlets of Derbyshire Preaching Places (% of 130 analysed)				
Within	f=1+	f=2+	f=3+	f=4+
0.5 miles	11.5	0.8	0.0	0.0
1 mile	37.7	10.8	2.3	0.0
1.5 miles	67.7	33.1	16.2	3.1
2 miles	87.7	53.1	33.8	17.7

Given that Shropshire had a slightly denser provision than Derbyshire, the conclusion that clustering occurred irrespective of tenure is inescapable. One set of returns, for the village of Minsterley in Shropshire, population 988 in 1851, perhaps exposed the reason for this behaviour.⁴⁵ Thanks to the presence of PM outlets in nearby villages to the north and west, and the Stiperstones ridge to the east, it was an area unlikely to have numbers boosted by incomers, since it was isolated to the south, apart from its hamlets lying 1-2 miles distant. The village was home to a recently-built chapel where the congregation met afternoon and

⁴⁴ The Wesleyans had more outlets there than the Prims (201 vs. 130) yet both connexions had 38% of outlets which had at least one neighbour within a mile, and the Prims' two-mile showing of 88% was only two percentage points below the Wesleyan figure.

⁴⁵ Field, *Shropshire*, entries nos. 286-8 inclusive. 1851 population census results as stated by him.

evening. It had over 100 empty seats on Census Sunday. Yet it had two other preaching-places that appear to have been cottage venues. These two entries were similar: 144 square feet of space accommodating 30 on bench seating, but in two different room layouts. The first met in the evening, and had 21 worshippers; the second in the afternoon, attracting 18 worshippers; so neither existed to provide an outlet at times when the chapel was not providing a service. The same man signed both cottage returns, describing himself as 'manager' resident at Minsterley. Both also carried the mark of James Luther, of Ladyoak, suggesting that as a location for both. Yet it prompted the questions: first why, given that it was not capacity-driven, was there a need for alternative venues so close to a dedicated outlet with two-thirds spare capacity; and second, if there was some reason other than geography in such a small village, why was there a need for two with, apparently, the same officials? It appears that: one, the desire to maintain cottage worship was not in this case driven by geography or capacity, but more probably attachment to an established venue; and two, these may have been a single splinter from the main congregation which shared the load of cottage accommodation between two families. Two possible reasons suggest themselves for this financially paradoxical behaviour, both reflecting popular demand. PM followers may have been 'voting with their feet' for a preferred liturgical style elsewhere, or perhaps it might simply signal a taste for variety in preaching among those who attended more than once on the Sabbath. If so, what drove the Prims to travel on special occasions, as at Dawley and Borrowash, might well have operated all the time, unrecognised by later commentators; and may have contributed to the provision or survival of additional small nearby outlets.

It poses the question as to whether Minsterley was perhaps untypical: if so, cottage outlets offering one service per Sabbath are to be explained because they were too small to warrant a dedicated replacement but were maintained because of geographic isolation. The

counter-hypothesis falls down when tested though: Shropshire's single-service cottage venues proved to be, on average, about one-third *closer* to their nearest neighbour than non-dedicated venues with multiple services: the continuing existence of the single-service venue appears to reflect active choice.

SUMMARY

In the years after 1828, the Prims' increasingly consistent set of recruitment and operational practices produced considerable variations in outcomes. There was no simple over-arching pattern but a clear and consistent failure in a few metropolitan ones, and in most of London's rural neighbours. The usual claim of a demand failure, i.e., urban alienation, appears doubtful; in the Prims' case, it may have been a failure of *supply* in that they simply did not have the machinery or the type of personnel needed to address the religious market in Britain's largest cities. Equally, the pattern of success in rural counties was hit-and-miss, and here again the conclusion is that there was no simple set of factors at work. The second main theme to emerge from the Census is that the connexion's relationship with Wesleyanism – whatever the rhetoric between the respective leaderships – was in practice beneficial to both parties, whereas the remaining low correlations call into question any claims that PM success is to be explained in terms of members' hardship, competition from the established church, or non-Methodist strands of Dissent. Third, the tenurial character of the estate differed materially from place to place, with important consequences for our understanding of the connexion based on local studies. Fourth, however, investigation of the patterns of propinquity in the network of outlets suggests that beneath an apparently divergent pattern of provision across English counties, there was probably an underlying commonality of demand, and it was financially paradoxical. A connexion that had so many lay preachers and aspirants ambitious to join their number (coupled with so little central control) might prefer to keep venue numbers down for cost

reasons, but did the reverse. Small outlets, both cottage-based and dedicated, were opened close to existing larger ones – and were often overflowing, while the more economical outlets were half-full. That surely reflected follower demand, rather than central policy; and while Prim missioning methods allowed the movement to establish a following in communities bypassed by competitors, that was not the only, and perhaps not the principal, reason for the distinctive network of small chapels in what we now regard as secondary locations.

The findings also raise some unanswered questions. If there was a significant level of cross-attendance *within* Primitive Methodism, it would undermine the implicit assumption that ‘congregations’ and ‘venues’ are coterminous entities. The Minsterley example suggests that one congregation may have been occupying two venues, and is unlikely to have been unique. Allied to that is the issue of the impulse to replace cottage venues with dedicated premises. The taste for multiple outlets would in itself have made the Prims less ready to do so, because the cost of maintaining them was higher. All other things being equal, therefore, the Prims would have been slower to abandon cheaper cottage outlets than a denomination that could enforce a degree of centralisation instead. Some, at least, of the poverty-induced characterisation of the Prim cottage estate (which was less pronounced than generally understood, for reasons as discussed above) is therefore misleading.

While these findings are complex and nuanced, they are unequivocal in that the evidence about the denomination does not support our modern understanding of it. In particular, the character of the chapel seems to owe more to bottom-up demand for a neighbourhood presence than a top-down and finance-dictated provision of small, cheap chapels. The estate forms the topic of the next chapter.

Nonconformist chapels have, in general, been seen as the poor relations of their Anglican brethren;¹ too often dismissed as 'mere grasping after respectability', the memorable phrase used to characterise so much academic dismissiveness of the embrace of Gothic in the later decades of the 19th century.² Those few historians who considered what the chapel could tell us about its builders have tended to focus on the iconic or the outstanding examples;³ consequently, the smaller, plainer chapels so characteristic of the Prims have been particularly marginalised as a source.⁴ Three of the most recent writers on Primitive Methodism have seen its chapels as the product of aesthetic and economic poverty: its 'architectural development' as 'modest'; aimed at the 'lower social classes'; and at the bottom of the Nonconformist cost spectrum.⁵ There were two more open approaches from the perspective of specifically chapel, rather than religious, history: Christopher Stell's work for the Royal Commission on the Historical and Ancient Monuments of England, and a study of the Nonconformist chapels of the East Riding, published not long after the first of his four volumes.⁶

Yet none of them aligned too well with the perspective obtained from the chapels, Prim and other, of the movement's original heartland between the Derbyshire foothills of the Pennines and the Welsh border.⁷ There, geography and community – rather than

¹ For example, the Anglican-focused Ecclesiological Society.

² Parsons, *RVB, Traditions*, p. 100.

³ Notably, Clyde Binfield, *So Down To Prayers: Studies in English Nonconformity*, London, 1977.

⁴ The case made in this chapter is based on a sample of the unit costs of some 460 chapels, and of the physical appearance, generally as built, of a further 973, but a detailed list cannot be accommodated here.

⁵ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p. 8; Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 139; Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 223.

⁶ Christopher Stell, (compiler), *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England*, London, 1986, followed by three further volumes on South-West (1991), Northern (1994) and Eastern England (2002); David & Susan Neave, *East Riding Chapels and Meeting Houses*, Hull, 1990.

⁷ The present writer had personally visited upwards of 50 Prim and Wesleyan chapels at the beginning of the research period, and while the sample would later rise significantly (to around 150 PM examples in this area alone), the pattern described above emerged very strongly. Notable instances at Cloud, Englesea Brook, Ellerdine Heath, Bomere Heath, Tiverton, Huxley and Bulkeley were encountered very early; and they had a material impact on the course of the research.

denomination – appeared to account for most stylistic differences between chapels. This pattern eroded over time however; the more recent the chapel, the more clearly the Prim version was differentiated, by its much greater resistance to Gothic influences. If this was typical, the small-plain-cheap orthodoxy in the general history accounts would owe more to discourse than to evidence, despite being apparently borne out by Stell's data. Yet these must be treated with circumspection. For example, he included neither an image of nor a reference to the particularly impressive Higher Ardwick chapel built in 1878, or any of the other large Manchester chapels featured by Kendall.⁸ This was no isolated omission: of the 100+ Shropshire PM chapels opened before Victoria's death (78 of which predated 1851), Stell identified only 34. Many of those he omitted were still working churches at the time and several continued to be so beyond the turn of the millennium. Meanwhile, the Neave data indicated a considerable commonality of design and stylistic preference between the two main strands of Methodism in East Yorkshire, whereas the western heartland pattern was more mixed. By and large, though, the Neave examples were later, and this may account for at least one notable difference: their quite different propensities to embrace Gothic, with the Prims engaging earlier, then drawing back after the late 1830s. A further theme though was the gap between the rhetoric and the reality. PM chapels described in humble terms by Methodists were often more than a match for Wesleyan contemporaries, and instances of unfeasibly low expenditures on chapels seemed to reflect a desire to magnify the movement's achievements rather than to report how the chapels were built.

⁸ An architectural drawing of the chapel is at <http://archiseek.com/2009/1876-primitive-methodist-chapel-school-house-ardwick-manchester-lancashire/>; Christopher Stell, (compiler), *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in the North of England*, London, 1994, pp. 112-117 include only 10 Manchester chapels, none PM. A montage of Manchester's chapels is at Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 27.

The methodology for this part of the research thus had to be alert to the impact of discourse –the broader one of dismissiveness of the Nonconformist chapel, and the heroic one relating to the Prims. An example of its dangers will suffice to make the general point. After Kendall's compendious Edwardian work, only Ambler in his study of South Lincolnshire tried to integrate the chapel estate into a broader characterisation of the movement, and both lighted upon chapels in Boston, Lincolnshire to make their points. Kendall's *History* features almost 300 images of British chapels across the 1000-plus pages of text, but the thrust and tenor of the two volumes differ markedly. The first contains 98 images of PM chapels, all but around 20 of which are small and plain; volume two, which deals with the mature church, has almost twice as many English images, two-thirds of which are large assertive structures. All but one of the nine former chapels among them converted to dwellings appear in the first volume, of which six are 'Tunstall' designs, i.e., constructed with the dimensions and external appearance of cottages to ease re-use, yet such designs were relatively uncommon. By contrast, montages of large aspirational chapels in 18 towns and cities account for only 17 of the volume one, but 134 of the volume two chapel images; they were equally untypical of what was actually built.⁹ So the editorial process portrays first the lowly beginnings then later emphasises the scale and quality of the mature connexional estate. The first volume closes with images of the two earliest Boston chapels. They are a 'Tunstall' and a plain three-bay design photographed after conversion to secular use, and appear old-fashioned, and rather dowdy.¹⁰

Kendall did not include the 1864 successor; Ambler did the reverse in 1989 when he featured it in contrast, not with its predecessors, but with other town chapels in the county

⁹ Individual images are too numerous to cite by page: montages are at Kendall, *Origin* i, pp. 461, 497 and 554-5; and *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 27, 42, 73, 114, 133, 198, 200, 263, 269, 351, 353, 457, 459, 461, 465, 468, 471, 475, 477 and 479.

¹⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p 558.

to instance his thesis of modest progress.¹¹ The three Boston chapels collectively suggest that both authors thus did not reflect the actual degree of design progression; yet the bigger problem is that both thereby overlooked the development dynamic that led to their construction in a period of about three decades. The first chapel has, from photographic analysis, a footprint of at least 450 square feet, which in a galleried chapel would readily seat 150.¹² It would therefore have continued to accommodate the faithful until at least 1851, to judge by the evening attendance on Census Sunday, and regarded by the steward who signed the return as typical. Yet that first chapel had been replaced, even before it had been fully paid-for, in 1839.¹³ In 1864 the second chapel, also not fully paid-for, was replaced and the debt rolled over.¹⁴ So twice in two generations, the movement had over-extended itself to build for future growth. Taken together, the three chapels read of too much ambition, not too little money or taste; and the financial strains on the congregation the results of that ambition, not the empty purses of the followers. Whether or not Boston was representative of the Prim experience, its treatment by later writers arguably is typical of the selective hindsight applied to the estate.

These and similar doubts about the evidence and its interpretation determined the methodological approach here: the goal was the largest possible dataset on chapels, both in terms of their style and costs, in order to seek out any denominational trends over time. The approach was comparative, since both the points of concurrence and difference between the Prims and the rest of Nonconformity – and the Wesleyans in particular – offered the prospect of useful insights. These inevitably had to rely upon dubious, often

¹¹ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, photographic image between pages 86 and 87.

¹² As discussed later, a space standard for galleried chapels of around 3 square feet of footprint per seat appears to have been common to all denominations, including the Anglicans, until quite late in the century. This related to pewed chapels; bench arrangements could hold higher numbers.

¹³ R. A. Ambler, *Lincolnshire*, 1979, entry no 252, provides the replacement date; the second chapel had a 280 capacity.

¹⁴ LRO: (circuit) Meth/B/Boston P/A; (chapel) Meth/C/Boston, West Street/A.

secondary, sources but while this introduced the risk of error, misattribution or failure to detect the impact of intervening alteration, the risk was diluted by the resulting large sample sizes.¹⁵ The data that emerged were skewed both by geography and community type: there were few cases of either cost or design evidence for chapels in the Home Counties and South Midlands for any Nonconformist denomination. While there were a few instances of chapels for which both cost and visual evidence was available, by and large the two datasets overlapped poorly, with a higher incidence of cost data for larger buildings, but visual evidence was more forthcoming in smaller communities. These reflected the factor of selective survival, respectively of the records and the fabric of the buildings. The dislocation of reunification exacerbated the Prims' poor archiving performance, and merging of congregations led to progressive sell-off of the smaller of duplicated chapels, usually the Prim one; the inefficient space offered by Gothic, and development pressures irrespective of style in larger towns and cities ensured that much PM Gothic and most large-town or city chapels were demolished, leaving an older, smaller, plainer and less urban estate than was built.

The initial goal of paired comparisons of competing chapel contemporaries in similar community types had to be abandoned, firstly because the data proved elusive, second because individual chapels were dubiously representative, and third because of the difficulty of establishing a context for individual buildings. The latter two are on view in the Prims' first chapel at Tunstall. A sketched image of the structure, no better record of which is known to exist, shows a building that looks like four small terraced houses.¹⁶ Kendall compared it unfavourably with a distinguished Wesleyan chapel built further up

¹⁵ It bears repetition that the resulting datasets are too large to be accommodated in the word budget for the thesis, which therefore reports only the results.

¹⁶ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 110. Many images in Kendall are hard to reproduce satisfactorily.

the same street to highlight the movement's humble beginnings.¹⁷ Yet that 1789 chapel had been built at the sole expense of a prosperous activist, Joseph Smith, and he had good reason to believe that it would prosper because there was no other religious outlet of any kind in the expanding town. It was thus untypical of what was being built elsewhere. The Prim chapel was a much riskier venture, and the design choice reflects not denominational poverty but the canniness of the Bourne brothers, who paid for and continued to own the building until the 1830s. This private funding of a PM chapel was not unique. The first chapel at Scotter was one of several lost to the connexion when their owners and the PM authorities later failed to see eye-to-eye; and John Benton, who featured briefly but importantly in the early connexion's history, personally funded three. Numerous other chapels were funded or underwritten, in whole or in part, by early luminaries, and Bourne would go on to fund a third in 1813.¹⁸ So the apparent evidence of humbleness turns out to conceal evidence of benefaction by at least modestly prosperous supporters. In this thesis, therefore, comparisons are to be seen as population-level ones, with individual chapels used as illustrations of the evidence, rather than the evidence itself. The analytical framework within which that was to be done follows Gerald Parsons' 1980s view. As noted in the opening paragraph, his warning against dismissing the Nonconformist chapel, and in particular its Gothic form, asserting that there were theological and liturgical motives at work too, has not impacted upon our view of the Prim chapel. Our view of what it 'ought' to have looked like fails to reflect the ambiguity of the Victorians, and the varying resistance to what was seen by some as 'Romish' idolatry.

¹⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 103.

¹⁸ Bourne had paid for the Harriseahead Wesleyan chapel, and later (1813) paid for Talke O' The Hill's first chapel – Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 122. The two volumes contain numerous references to chapels bequeathed to, paid for, substantially aided by, or rents privately met by individuals: (vol 1) pp. 193, 274, 317 (three chapels), 392 (three chapels), 398 and 496; (vol 2) pp. 95, 98 and 244 (each of the last two being instances of three chapels). Instances of loans from wealthy followers appear substantively cited later in this chapter (Hull Mill St) and in Chapter 9 (St Ives).

CHAPEL COSTS: METHODOLOGY

The PM chapel was smaller than its competitors, and so straight cost comparisons will show it in an unduly unfavourable light; yet only the headline cost figure is normally quoted.¹⁹ This thesis adopts a unit cost basis of comparison to avoid that problem; interestingly, the Leeds builder and architect James Simpson used the same approach when he wrote to the Wesleyan Building Committee in 1837. His sample of 10 representative commissions included a PM example. It was the third-cheapest of the ten; but it was the fourth most expensive on a per-seat basis.²⁰ The unit cost approach reduced the sample size materially – this exercise extended to only about half the number of pre-1851 costs per seat of Watts' sample of 72 PM chapels.²¹ It also favoured larger chapels over others, but the skewing by size was consistent across denominations;²² so too was that for costs overall.²³ This suggests that interdenominational differences should be reflecting divergent practice, even if the absolute values are in isolation misleading; while the results stratified by size and arrayed over time should discount that skewing.

The approach, however, raises a number of issues of reliability and admissibility: that cost per seat might be a less precise basis of comparison than cost per square foot; that affordability is one of only several factors that influence the outcome; that reported costs did not necessarily reflect the entire cost of building, particularly as a result of donation in kind of land, materials, professional skills and labour; and that the method is vulnerable to

¹⁹ Kendall, *Origin*, passim; Neave, *East Riding*, p. 5; Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, Chapter II, 5, pp. 222-240.

²⁰ Ian Serjeant, 'James Simpson (1791-1864)', in Christopher Webster, *Building a Great Victorian City: Leeds Architects and Architecture, 1790-1914*, Leeds, 2011, p. 156.

²¹ Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, p. 223.

²² Sample results were 443 seats (PM) and 620 (Wesleyan); Lincolnshire 1851 results (by way of example) were about 1/3 of these, at 151 and 203.

²³ Watts used a mix of mean (Wesleyan) and median (PM) figures for chapel costs. These covered different time-periods, so the relativities are not strictly comparable. Yet the PM median in the sample was £510, a factor of 2.55 times Watts' figure, whilst the Wesleyan 1840s mean of £1168 was about 2.45 times his 1846/47 figure (the unit-cost sample for those years being too small to compare).

fluctuating data sources. Each of these was investigated. Space standards across the Christian denominations as a whole proved to be remarkably consistent: while there were exceptional cases – usually associated with conspicuous benefaction – most cases amenable to check showed a space standard of 3 square feet of footprint for a galleried chapel or 4 square feet for a single-level auditorium. Legendary incidents of PM overcrowding did not mean more niggardly space standards.²⁴

The affordability issue is more troubling. Axiomatically, poorer congregations could afford to spend less per capita than wealthier ones; but the converse, that lower unit costs reflect lesser congregational wealth, does not follow because unit spend reflects more than the socio-economic standing of the congregation. Several other factors might be in play, notably that a congregation imbued with a continuing dislike of ‘idolatrous’ churches might spend less per seat for theological, not economic, reasons. This does not invalidate the method, but it calls for care in judgement and appropriate qualification of findings.

Donation in kind was an issue for all denominations, but apparently more so for Methodists. For example the 1845 replacement Wesleyan chapel at Key Green in Cheshire cost only £1.59 a seat, which placed it (see below, ‘Chapel Costs – Results’) about 50% of the contemporary Nonconformist average. Yet according to the circuit history that provided the costing, the ‘late Thomas Norbury, Esq., of Macclesfield, gave the value of

²⁴ See, for example, Serjeant, ‘Simpson’, p. 156; this writer’s computations. On overcrowding, newspaper evidence shows that the Prims suffered the problem earlier, and to a smaller degree, than the legendary accounts would suggest. PM instances were reported in *Caledonian Mercury*, 27th Sept 1821 (at Keighley); *Ipswich Journal* 8th February 1823 (at Norwich); *Morning Chronicle*, 24th July 1827 (at Falmouth); *Liverpool Mercury*, 28th Sept 1827 (at Manchester); and finally *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, 18th Jan 1834 (at Helston). In the last three cases, injuries were minor. By contrast, there were reports for Wesleyan, at Bacup, Lancashire, reported in *Bury and Norwich Post*, 20th October 1847; and RC, at Drury Lane, London, reported in the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 4th August 1849. The Bacup death-toll exceeded that at all five reported PM accidents together.

the ground' for a 'substantial stone chapel, of superior design and finish'.²⁵ The description is arguably generous, but it remains a pleasant and tasteful little country chapel. More pronounced cases of donation in kind occurred before this date, as discussed later, but as late as 1858 this continued to impact the stated costs of PM chapels in particular: the PM chapel at Hetton-le-Hole, Co. Durham was built on a site sold below market rate, with both transport and main construction materials supplied free by the colliery owners, and labour provided by the congregation and other local volunteers. The cash outlay of £1.30 per seat reflects only a very small element of the real cost of the building, and calls into question other similarly niggardly stated costs.²⁶

The data availability issue was whether it reflected selection bias, and this was not restricted to the Prims. The largest Congregationalist source was the series of *Year-Books* commencing in 1847, which contained articles on chapels built by them. Yet the featured chapels were untypical: they were about 70% more expensive than the generality of chapels built thanks to central funding.²⁷ They were also suddenly very numerous: the first 11 year-books featured 101 chapels, more than double the number identified in the preceding half-century from other sources, and almost four times the number of competitors' chapels uncovered for the same period. Inclusion was thus out of the question: the effect would be to create a mistaken perception that Congregational chapels suddenly became both more numerous and costlier at this point. So unless the featured chapels had emerged from other search processes independently, those featured in the year-book were included only in comparisons of local competitive effects. In the event, a

²⁵ John Dyson, *The History of Wesleyan Methodism in the Congleton Circuit...*, London, 1856: net-published, without pagination, at www.rewlach.org.uk/books/Congleton/index.htm. The quotations come from net-page 57 of 67; the costs from p. 65.

²⁶ Data from church website: <http://www.hettonmethodistchurch.org/10.html>, consulted 2009, and verified still current 3rd March 2012.

²⁷ *Year-Books* for 1856 and 1857 featured individual chapels (18,620 seats capacity) costing £4.59 each; but noted that central funding had added a further 26,530 seats at an average cost of £2.68 each. With no data on which chapels these were, they could not appear individually in the cost sample.

single surprising comparison was produced by this: Manchester's Cavendish Congregational chapel, widely regarded as the most sumptuous chapel of the age in the area at £14,000, was nearly twice as expensive as the PM chapel in Moss Lane nearby, but actually cost less per seat because it was more than twice as big. The Congregationalist skewing avoided here was the opposed discourse to that of the Prims: their year-books proclaimed a social standing greater than they actually possessed.

The Moss Lane example is unusual in another respect though. It was substantially remodelled and extended, but the costs (quoted by Kendall within the context of the movement's mature achievements in England's cities) must include subsequent spend.²⁸ The practice of opening chapels as a relatively bare shell and furnishing progressively was common across Methodism, but the Wesleyans, with better records and more desire to advertise their social standing, would be better able to have gathered together those subsequent expenditures on equipping the building and to wish to declare them. For example, the stated cost and capacity of the 1823 chapel built by them in Macclesfield is for it as subsequently extended, not as originally built.²⁹ The Prims, by contrast, often had neither the records nor the desire to do so. These are abbreviated extracts of Kendall's account of a close contemporary, the 1819 Hull Mill Street Chapel:

A piece of ground at the end of Mill Street, on which some old buildings were standing, was purchased...for the sum of £345. Eleven pounds more were spent in clearing the ground for building...The chapel was in an unfinished state when opened, as the pews lacked doors, and the building throughout was unpainted...The total cost of the Mill Street undertaking is given as £1,604 18s. 9d...amongst those by whom the work was projected and carried out, there was only here and there one who had any other source of income than the returns of his own labour week by week.³⁰

²⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 465.

²⁹ Samuel Bagshaw, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Cheshire*, Sheffield, 1850, pp. 211/2: the capacity of 1400 and a cost upwards of £5000 relate to the extended structure, not the three-bay original.

³⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 373-4.

It is a heroic tale of reckless confidence in which the land cost alone represented ten years' salary for William Clowes, undertaken by poor followers buoyed up by faith. Except that it was not: 90% of the initial cost was loaned by four wealthy members of the congregation, one of whom was the original owner of the land, sold at full market price; and the lenders charged 5% pa interest.³¹ The tone of the account underplays the starting intention of building a pewed chapel, and a photographic image of the chapel interior suggests that it was anything but spartan as finished; but the fact is not immediately obvious because the source refers to it as West Street, the name change reflecting its revised access.³² It is likely that the stated figure did not include all of these fitting-out costs, and possible that the totals exclude all of them. Even so, the unit cost of Mill Street, net of land, was slightly higher than that for Key Green's 'superior' Wesleyan chapel built twenty-six years later, and allowing for economies of scale, must have been rather more commodious. The striking fact, though, is not the similarity of spend between the two, but the differing rhetorics of the two movements in describing them.

The use of chapel costs over such a lengthy period raises inevitable difficulties over the intervening impact of inflation. It is easier to discern the factors than their proportionate effect: the loss of access to Baltic timber in the Napoleonic era; the abolition of excise duty on glass in 1845 and of the brick tax in 1850; falling materials prices due to technological innovation; and wages rising faster than prices. The impact of these was complex: substitution of materials fed back into designs (e.g., glazing replacing masonry). Despite such one-off effects, though, the most insistent trend was rising wages: one writer estimates that 'wages as a proportion of total building costs for ordinary structures rose from under a quarter before 1850 to nearly half by 1914'. On balance therefore, indexation

³¹ Hatcher, 'PM in Hull', p. 154.

³² Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 459: the small image does not reproduce satisfactorily.

here has been undertaken relative to wages: it may tend to slightly overstate cost inflation, but will reasonably reflect the changing affordability of the buildings to the waged followers of the movement.³³

This long list of caveats invites the response that the results of such an exercise cannot offer a sound dataset for analysis; but the alternative is potentially worse. The well-documented case may be highly instructive but is by its very nature unrepresentative. For example, Clyde Binfield's exposition of the chapel-building activities of the Huddersfield Congregationalists, in particular the building of Hillhouse, an outreach chapel in the expanding West Yorkshire town, shows that, despite the public emphasis on recruiting and retaining the more refined, the movement's actual priorities were much as everyone else: to accommodate people where they might see, hear and be stirred by the preacher.³⁴ Yet this outreach chapel was 20% more expensive than the contemporary Congregationalist average, more expensive indeed than the parent. An 1837 gazetteer entry suggests that it tells us more about Huddersfield than about Congregationalism:

The Chapels in the town, unconnected with the established church, are seven in number...The Wesleyans have two large and handsome chapels, one on Chapel Hill, built in 1837, on the site of one taken from the New Connexion about 25 years ago; and the other in Queen Street, built in 1819, at the cost of £8,000, and having seats for 2000 hearers... The Independents have two chapels, one a small building at Highfield, and the other a large and elegant structure in Ramsden Street, built in 1824-5, at the cost of nearly £6,000, and having 1,250 sittings, besides seats for 350 Sunday scholars.³⁵

³³ Dr Christopher Wakeling, of Keele University and Chairman of the Chapels Society, kindly provided many of these insights, and also the lead to the quotation: Stefan Muthesius, *The English Terraced House*, New Haven, 1982, p. 30. (Dr Wakeling's expanded comment and agreement to this writer's e-mail summary of discussions with him are contained in correspondence in the possession of the writer dated 8th May 2012.) The indexes themselves were taken from a US academic website: www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/, selecting 'average earnings' from the menu.

³⁴ Binfield, *So Down To Prayers*, p. 157ff.

³⁵ William White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of the West-Riding of Yorkshire, with the City Of York and port of Hull...*, Sheffield, 1837, p 365. The transcription here given removes the use of italics for street names and other unfortunate punctuation.

So the Ramsden Street congregation (which funded much of the expenditure on Hillhouse) spent no more per seat on their own chapel than the Wesleyans had done a few years previously. Both were spending significantly more than the norm for Nonconformity around that time. In this instance there are no good comparative data on PM local challengers; but it underlines the importance of a local and inter-denominational context to the interpretation of chapel cost.

CHAPEL COSTS - RESULTS

This approach yielded a satisfyingly large sample of over 460 Nonconformist chapels of various denominations built in the nineteenth century.

Table 8.1 Unit Costs of 19th Century Nonconformist Chapels, by decade:

date	£ cost/seat	cost/seat 1801£*	average seats	sample size
1801-10	2.15	1.98	875	15
1811-20	3.34	2.92	891	26
1821-30	2.55	2.61	583	66
1831-40	3.05	3.09	531	58
1841-50	3.19	3.06	517	65
1851-60	3.41	2.95	560	65
1861-70	4.79	3.70	573	53
1871-80	6.74	4.48	643	52
1881-90	6.29	4.11	514	43
1891-1900	6.04	3.64	406	21

*adjusted to constant prices relative to nominal average earnings, as *fn33*.

The results are neither random nor representative, showing significant skewing by size, as already discussed, and geographically. They are spread over only 20 historic counties, 13 of which are northern. The Home Counties and South Midlands are particularly poorly featured. Fortunately, though, the cause was differential recording by geography, not by denomination. It was not a case of Congregational examples being concentrated in the south, and Methodists in the north, because the northern counties accounted for the

substantial majority in all cases. The table above may thus be seen as reasonably representative of trends, in the northern counties, at least.

Two conclusions emerge clearly, and the first is fairly understandable. While there was an unmistakable trend for chapels to become more expensive in real terms over the century, the process featured two periods of acceleration followed by decades of stasis or even slight decline. The first rise at the end of the Napoleonic era no doubt reflects the changing social and legal status of Dissenters who responded by building more assertive and therefore more expensive chapels.³⁶ Wesley's feared process of self-enrichment arising from a sober, diligent lifestyle among the faithful is unlikely to have been restricted to Methodists, and so most had the means to accompany the Arminian motivation to fund both more chapels and more elaborate ones. Yet as Wesleyan baptismal register evidence confirms, Nonconformists soon had to head down-market in search of new members, and this may well account for the reining-in of spend through to the 1840s. The decline of the 1850s is due to the rash of chapel-building undertaken by dissident ex-Wesleyans after the Fly Sheets controversy: fully one-quarter of the sample chapels in that decade were built by UMFC constituents, costing 38% less per seat than contemporaries in the other strands of Nonconformity. This was a one-off effect however; post-1850, there would be no further large-scale schism among Methodists, and Nonconformists as a whole enjoyed a rising welfare position, despite significant pockets of hardship for a minority.

The second conclusion is less straightforward: that there was a perverse relationship between size and costliness. Buildings of a constant standard should exhibit a declining marginal unit cost as they grow, thanks to economies of scale, and since the impact of that

³⁶ Dr Wakeling's observations about timber costs in the Napoleonic era no doubt account for at least some of the peak in the 1810s, but the effect unwound fairly quickly, and the 1820s figures confirm that a 30% rise in spend had occurred.

is fractional, a change in chapel size should produce a smaller but opposite change in unit prices. Divergence from that means changing levels of opulence and decorativeness; and the only one of the nine decennial shifts that matched was the special case of the 1850s, where post-1849 schismatic movements needed big chapels quickly, but lacked the funds for assertive ones. The only other case of opposed changes was in the 1830s, when a 9% decline in average size was accompanied by an 18% increase in unit cost; in the remaining seven cases, changes in chapel size produced parallel changes in unit spend, signalling some broad imperative to spend more, proportionately, on large chapels than small ones, more than cancelling out any economies of scale. The possibility must exist, though, that this was a false correlation, caused for example by different build practices between the denominations – e.g., Prims building small, cheap chapels and others building bigger and more expensive ones. Table 8.2 confirms, however, that this was not the case: the perversely positive tendency of unit costs to rise with size was present within each of the three main denominations in the sample.

Table 8.2

Correlation coefficient	Date to size	Date to price	Price to size
All Nonconformists	-0.10	0.51	0.26
Congregationalists	-0.15	0.42	0.25
Wesleyans	-0.11	0.53	0.28
PM	0.08	0.67	0.32

Note: The price-size correlation is statistically moderate; it is, though, very significant because it is the reverse of the result that would obtain based on decreasing marginal costs.

These results might be the product of more complex changes, e.g., largely unchanging unit costs but a shifting mix of chapel sizes. Table 8.3 examines whether that was potentially the case. Sample size dictated an assessment restricted to a first-half – second-half comparison of chapels up to 1000 seating capacity; the results confirm not only that all

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

three movements spent more, pro-rata, on their larger chapels but also that the gap widened across the century.

Table 8.3 Cost per seat by chapel size and date, PM, WM and Cong compared

Cost per seat	1801-1850			1851-1900			% change		
	Prim	Wes	Cong	Prim	Wes	Cong	Prim	Wes	Cong
1-250	1.57	1.58	1.81	1.89	2.33	2.40	20	47	33
251-500	1.72	2.06	2.40	2.46	2.94	3.31	43	43	38
501-1000	2.69	3.02	3.21	3.10	4.89	4.47	15	62	39
Overall	1.93	2.22	2.97	2.64	3.89	3.75	37	75	26

Note 1: Figures net of inflation, as per *fn33*.

Note 2: Chapels in the 1001+ seat range are included in the overall averages; Wesleyans built 23 of their 30 very large chapels present in the sample before 1850, and spent significantly less per seat (£2.93) on them than on the 501-1000 seat categories, hence the overall change appearing anomalous relative to the three listed constituents.

In addition, though, they signal some key differences. The Prims matched their competitors' spending increases in their medium chapels, but fell further behind on their larger ones. Yet the interpretation of these numbers must allow for the effect of donation in kind. It was a more significant feature of smaller and earlier builds, and the example below of three contemporary chapels compared underlines how significant the effect might be. The Prims' small early chapels were under 1% lower than the Wesleyans' in cash terms, and under 14% lower than the Congregationalists' ones; so even quite modest levels of non-cash inputs would have extinguished the latter's lead, and reversed that of the Wesleyans. In the later decades when the gap was 20%, and the likely scale of donation in kind reduced, this argument is less tenable. But while denominational finances were one factor in the second-half PM performance, this alone is unlikely to explain the reasons for differential failure, notably to match competitor spending increases in the larger chapels. One hypothesis is that because the Prims were more committed to expansion than other churches, they were less exercised with competing stylistically merely for assertiveness'

sake. The need to make a public statement in one place had to be balanced against the desire to expand in another.

Table 8.4 Range of costs per seat, PM, WM and Cong, 1871-1900, inflation-adjusted

	Bottom 20%		Top 20%		High-low price ratio
	Ave. size	£ price	Ave. size	£ price	
Prims	401	1.74	710	4.64	2.7
Wesleyan	382	1.97	833	8.93	4.5
Congregationalists	352	1.72	740	5.95	3.5

The spectrum of spending in the closing three decades of the century (the period where costs are least likely to have been affected by under-reporting or donations in kind), shown in Table 8.4 above, suggests that this was the case. The smallest per-seat budgets applied to the smallest chapels in all three cases, and the spend levels there were closely matched; but the larger and most expensive builds differed significantly. The most expensive PM chapel for which data were forthcoming was Chester, George Street (£9.60 per seat), and an inspection of the montages of another 128 chapels in Kendall's *History* cited earlier indicates that this was likely to be typical of the later spend in larger centres. Yet they still lagged their competitors: the most expensive Wesleyan chapel in the sample cost £23.80 per seat.³⁷ The Prims were not immune from the need to compete, but when they did, they spent only the amount *sufficient* for the purpose; their competitors seem to have spent as much as they could afford.

The second reason to doubt the poverty hypothesis is the conundrum that the connexion stuck tenaciously to the most expensive design options for its chapels. Jobson's 1850 argument, supported by Watts and borne out by the sample results for Barrow-in-Furness to be discussed later, that Gothic was cheaper than the resource-hungry Classical

³⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 554-56 provides chapel images and the overall cost for George St; seating capacity from Kelly, *Cheshire*, 1896, p. 190, which also provides (p. 165) the cost for Bowdon, Enville Road, Wesleyan chapel. The calculation assumes that £5000 of the £20,000 overall budget was spent on the manse and schoolrooms, which may be on the high side; so the unit cost might well be understated here.

alternative, shows that the Prim decision – which cannot have been in ignorance either of the secular trends or the financial case for Gothic – was neither blinkered nor economic in origin.³⁸ Nonconformists struck a balance among several motivations; but civic assertiveness may have played a lesser part in Prim thinking. They built their smaller and earlier chapels more cheaply not because they could afford no more, but because, in the places they initially established a presence it was all they required; whereas they spent more on their bigger and their later chapels not because they could afford to, but because they *had* to. For a relatively poor denomination, therefore, the desire not to adopt Gothic was economically counter-intuitive.

CHAPEL DESIGN: AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

The limited taste for Gothic requires explanation, but it is only one of the questions to ponder in considering the physical appearance of chapels. Other data indicate that the rhetorical gap between the Prims and other denominations was considerably wider than the reality; and that the acknowledged real differences were more nuanced than can be explained simply by a poverty account. Image data allow an independent perspective on these questions. They however must be fitted into an explanatory framework that recognises that the pressures on Nonconformity were no less keenly felt by the Prims, even if they responded differently. The desire to be noticed, and to advertise the purpose and nature of what went on within the chapel, applied to any expansive denomination. In approaching the evidence, therefore, date, community size and the local competitive environment are key elements to be reflected, as in the following explanatory model.³⁹

³⁸ Frederick Jobson, *Chapel & School Architecture, as Appropriate to the Buildings of Nonconformists, Particularly to Those of the Wesleyan Methodists*, London, 1850; discussed in Watts, *The Dissenters*, 1995, pp. 604-5.

³⁹ After Parsons, *RVB, Traditions*, p 68ff, and especially pp. 100-101.

Figure 8

	Dissent	Nonconformity	Free Churches
Religious impulse	Calvinist	Arminian	<i>Normative</i>
Architectural impulse	Inward-looking	Public	Sacred
Style outcome	<i>Vernacular</i>	<i>Classical</i>	<i>Gothic</i>

The design labels are perhaps professionally gauche or inappropriate, especially to the architecturally trained, but are a useful shorthand; italicised entries above denote explications beyond Parsons. This interpretive model is necessarily a generalisation, one that underplays the progressive nature of the change process, and how it occurred at different rates in different places.⁴⁰ What it points to, though, is that the process had both a social and a religious context. Evangelical priorities progressively became to make their places of worship sacred; but they were also aimed at making recruits socially included. In reaching out to the unchurched, they increasingly wanted to bring them *within* the social order, rather than simply to take the message of salvation beyond it. This produced complex, and sometimes contradictory, trends: the same people were building ostentatious Gothic urban ‘cathedrals’, undistinguished vernacular mission-houses, and large Classical or Baroque Central Halls, each to target distinct market segments.

These stylistic labels are not self-explanatory. ‘Vernacular’ is commonly used to describe both the eighteenth-century meeting-house (and many small country chapels of the first half of the nineteenth that continued the design) and the late Victorian mission-halls such as Scarborough’s Durham Street.⁴¹ Yet they were the product of fundamentally opposed intentions. The Dissenting meeting-house, often dominating its surroundings, and with

⁴⁰ Neave, *East Yorkshire*, p. 21ff, found clearly distinct Classical and Italianate periods; this larger multi-county sample did not.

⁴¹ An image of this building, uncertainly dated to c.1885, is appended as Image 19.

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

high windows that produced downward streams of light upon the faithful, had a stark grandeur that spoke of propriety;⁴² it was the antithesis of the 'popish' idolatry on view in Anglican or Roman Catholic churches, and it implicitly targeted only the elect. The mission-hall had a different reason for trying not to look like a religious building: the increasingly grand chapel was seen as a barrier to working class enrolment. Durham Street was intended as a conduit to membership, in effect a subsidiary brand.

Similarly, the label 'Classical' needs clarification. It is used here for convenience to embrace a family of styles that have in common a symmetrical and massive appearance with low-pitched roof, whether Georgian, Italianate, Tudor, Romanesque or Grecian.⁴³ Two common characteristics were Palladian in inspiration, even though that term is hardly appropriate for buildings that were nearer in scale to domestic than country-house architecture. First the buildings were not only symmetrical, but initially showed no decline in status (as reflected in the prominence of window and door reveals) with horizontal displacement; second there was a decline in the vertical plane with a chapel auditorium often sandwiched between smaller windows illuminating a gallery above and semi-basement below, housing school and meeting rooms.

Finally, the switch to Gothic was messy but unmistakable, with needle-shaped windows inserted in buildings with low-pitch roofs, and/or those retaining the polychrome brickwork of the rectangular-box chapel: for some decades, it was unclear whether these were Classical buildings with Gothic features or Gothic ones with Classical hangovers. Thus, some buildings classified here as Gothic would elsewhere be dismissed as

⁴² The issue of raked auditoria as the impulse for high windows is discussed later: the point here though is about the effect, not the intention.

⁴³ Although apparently less precise than the periodisation and labels used by the Neaves, a broader categorisation better reflects the national pattern in which many related styles were present simultaneously.

vernacular. The purpose of the label is to reflect the builders' intentions to make a transition, not an aesthetic judgement on how well they executed it; and in any case attempting to judge these buildings in terms of architectural merit is doomed to failure, because the Anglican place of worship, with its superior funding, access to land, historical legacy and lower resistance to Catholic influences, was able to set a standard to which the chapel was neither able nor willing to offer a competitive threat. The Anglicans could afford to spend double, per seat, on their chapels up to 1851 in comparison with the rest; and they spent about 50% more on refurbishments, per seat, than the Nonconformists could afford to lay out on their new builds in the second half of the century, if the data for Devon are typical.⁴⁴ Yet the messy and untutored character of so much of the estate is potentially informative. The real and visible differences among the Nonconformist chapel populations provide a fresh insight into the Prims.

CHAPEL IMAGES

Each chapel was classified then rated. Classification was among vernacular, Classical and Gothic. The first of these was restricted to those few cases where there was no material evidence of a design intention to make a public statement about what went on inside. Otherwise – apart from four Congregational Baroque examples – chapels fell into one or other category, for which the key markers were roof pitch, the shapes of door and window reveals, and the degree to which visual symmetry was important. The symmetry judgement was complicated by the trend to elaboration: columns, pediments, finials, and polychrome brickwork accentuated symmetry, but steeples, towers, cupolas and the like

⁴⁴ Average cost of 82 Anglican churches built 1800-1850 in Derbyshire, East Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Oxfordshire = £5.90 per seat; 218 sampled Nonconformist chapels, same dates, = £2.93. *Kelly's Directory of Devon, 1902*, London, reported 25 major refurbishments of Anglican churches dating after 1850 averaging £8.05 per seat; this was 51% above the £5.33 average for the county's contemporary Nonconformist builds, which closely matched the national figure (£5.41).

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

were incompatible with it. The rating placed each chapel into classes of high, medium or low style. In both classification and rating, most chapels could be allocated to one of these categories fairly easily, and where it was not, a series of paired comparisons provided a defensible answer for what, after all, is a comparative not an absolute judgement.

About 100 of the judgements were based on personally-inspected chapels, most of which were examined only on the exterior.⁴⁵ Ideally, the researcher would prefer to rely solely on the close inspection which exposes much of the important architectural and structural detail and provides an essential context. Yet the scale of resource commitment, plus demolitions and intervening alterations together make that non-feasible. The sample size demanded by the methodology thus required judgements in the main conducted on photographic images. These bring both problems and advantages. For example, the fact of alteration is sometimes clearer in the image than the original –for example, the 1834 Maesbury, Shropshire PM chapel, where the brickwork of the Gothic reveals is incongruous and clearly later than the stone chapel – Image 1. On other occasions, the source helpfully provides archive images of the altered and unaltered structures (the clearest example is the 1827 chapel at Bomere Heath, Shropshire – Image 2).⁴⁶ Sometimes, however, it must simply be the combination of two relatively uninformative images to produce a larger whole: Macclesfield's Beech Lane PM Chapel (Image 3) is today modestly pleasing, but in the context of its original siting, with its graveyard and an adjacent Sunday school, all set back from the road and enclosed in decorative railings with an arched entry-gate complete with street-lamp, it was clearly a much more distinguished building then.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Most had in fact been converted to secular use and so access was neither possible nor helpful.

⁴⁶ The modern appearance of the chapel is shown in Image 2; yet an archive photograph shows the original fenestration was much plainer: <http://www.users.waitrose.com/~coxfamily/bomerzn2.htm>.

⁴⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p 539.

The resulting collection of about 1500 chapel images covering much of England had to be culled by about a third, due to missing denominational or date attribution, or in a few cases to build dates before 1811 or after 1900, or where the image was inadequate. The net sample reduced to 973 chapels representing the built estates of the Congregationalists (157) and Wesleyans (432) plus 384 chapels of the subject of the research, the Prims, although a few permitted classification, but not rating.⁴⁸

A final point bears repetition however: this was not an aesthetic exercise, but a judgement of how quickly and insistently the denominations embraced the public and then the sacred; so strength of design intention mattered more than taste. Two Lincoln neighbouring competitors (Images 4 and 5) encapsulate the issue: aesthetically, the Wesleyan chapel is greatly preferable (to this observer's eye at least) but as evidence of a strong wish to present a sacred face to the world, the two are very much on a par.

Furthermore, judging the degree of assertiveness was necessarily time- and place-dependent, because the builder's challenge of making the chapel stand out rose over time, and as community size grew. The rating system had to accommodate that, because the alternative was to condemn all small and most early chapels to obscure mediocrity, even though they might be locally outstanding. It entailed a judgement of how and to what extent the chapel dominated the street scene. Relative height, prominence, and orientation were all important factors, and outranked more purist architectural ones. Thus Englesea Brook, Image 6, earns strong marks for its early date and dominant position in a small village of fewer than 20 houses. Built a generation or two later, and located in a busy town, it would be unremarkable, but here it is not. Even though it sits about four feet

⁴⁸ A further 131 chapels where the denomination could be confidently attributed, but the dating was imprecise, might also have been included in stylistic analyses, but the wish to avoid introducing an unnecessary variability took precedence over that for the largest feasible sample size.

below the two-storey cottages to the right, it towers over them and the one-storey 1914 schoolroom that stands between them, and it has clearly been orientated to face down to the centre of the village at a point where the road bends. In addition, its face has a trompe-l'oeil effect thanks to being both wider and taller than the building it fronts. The collective effect is to produce a starkly impressive and locally dominant building, and this sense is greatly strengthened by considering a small country chapel built by the Wesleyan Methodist Association at Clive Green, Winsford, under 10 miles away (Image 7). But for the inscription above the door, this would be taken to be an eighteenth-century meeting-house. The chapel was as tall as its neighbouring two-storey houses, and the window design is almost identical with Englesea's, but these are set high in the wall. It may be argued that this was a function of the building's internal arrangements – for example a raked auditorium or planned standing room where windows were intentionally high as a result – but the first of these is less likely in small chapels, simply because of the cost implications, and the latter less likely in a schismatic build. In small chapels such as Cloud and Englesea Brook, the problem of the preacher's visibility was resolved by raising the pulpit, not the pews. In the latter case, the high windows were thus on the back wall; and as configured after 1832 there was little or no space for standing. Its plainness is open, and is austere rather than featureless. It sums up to a very assertive result and in this respect contrasts interestingly with Image 8, a WM chapel at Boushwaite, North Yorkshire, built in 1890. Every individual feature of that stone chapel is superior to Englesea Brook's, but its external appearance and orientation have been dictated by its internal arrangements, not by any desire to impose upon the street-scene. At Englesea Brook sixty years earlier, the congregation wanted to do both things – and could clearly afford it. Thus the 'better' building gets a poorer rating. This was an extreme example though; most chapels were rated more readily.

CHAPEL IMAGES: RESULTS

The two most important trends were the timing and pace of Gothic arrival, and the extent to which denominations opted for more stylish chapels.

Table 8.5: Gothic propensity, % of sampled chapels built

Denomination	1811-30	1831-50	1851-70	1871-00
Congregationalist	0	34	67	80
Wesleyan	5	14	34	51
Primitive Methodist	4	15	20	38

Table 8.6: 'Distinguished' % share of design total by denomination by design family

Denomination	Classical %	Gothic %
Congregationalist	26	33
Wesleyan	17	18
Primitive Methodist	13	9

Note: 'distinguished' is all high-style chapels as a proportion of all chapels of that design family in the sample.

Table 8.7: 'Distinguished' % by denomination by date by design family

% Distinguished	1811-30	1831-50		1851-70		1871 onwards	
Denomination	C only	Class	Goth	Class	Goth	Class	Goth
Congregationalist	39	21	20	33	45	0	28
Wesleyan	22	16	36	13	8	17	19
Primitive Methodist	9	9	22	10	7	17	12

Note: sample sizes too small for calculation of Gothic results 1811-30.

This pattern is not straightforward. All three denominations moved towards Gothic, but at different rates, with the Congregationalists last to begin but then the most enthusiastic adopters. Methodists were more likely, initially, to accompany the switchover with more highly stylish designs; the Congregationalists exhibited a drop in high-style chapels when they began to switch design families and inspection of individual results places the point of crossover (when high-style was more likely to be exhibited in Gothic than Classical

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

designs) to after 1862. Thereafter, Gothic (and later, Baroque) monopolised their most distinguished designs. By contrast the Prims, who dallied with Gothic but then drew back from it for about two decades from the later 1830s, more often opted on resumption for Classical designs in their high-style chapels. For Wesleyans, despite the central call for that switchover to be made around 1850, the connexion's local preferences were still against Gothic, if only marginally, until the late Victorian period. They built fewer distinguished chapels than the Congregationalists, but while their Gothic chapels were more often distinguished in the 1870s and thereafter, there was not the same wholesale abandonment of high-style Classical builds.

The foregoing is messy, but in two respects very plain: there were distinct trends towards Gothic and to gentrification, and one did not drive the other; and the varying enthusiasm for Gothic among and within each movement suggests that there were denominationally-significant factors in operation. The Congregationalist pattern would suggest that its clearer origins within Old Dissent initially made it more resistant to 'Romish' idolatry, but that once this was overcome, a denomination that had moved further from preaching to worship in a modern sense adopted Gothic more enthusiastically; the Wesleyans, meanwhile, had less principled opposition, but a greater attachment to preaching; but the Prims seem to have been influenced in a more complex manner, reflecting among other things expansion strategy and local competitiveness.

Chapter 7 has already pointed to the likelihood that PM expansion was distinctive, and cited the area of southwest Cheshire. There, Tarporley was home to an Anglican, Wesleyan and Prim congregation; and in common with other slightly larger centres, the first two avoided building outlets close by; but the Prims did so at adjacent villages there, Huxley and Tiverton, which had 1851 populations of 267 and 747 respectively. Prior to

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

1842, neither village had any religious building, although both were early sites of open-air preaching by PM itinerants.⁴⁹ Indeed Huxley, even without a chapel, was briefly head of the branch that would in due course become Chester circuit; the reason was that Ephraim Sadler farmed there before retiring in comfort nearer to Chester, and his warm reception (paralleled by his brother, who farmed at Tiverton) established a cause in the village.⁵⁰ Yet Tarporley was not the only possible outlet, as both villages had others nearby – see Map 7. In Huxley, they produced good enough results to be able to afford to rebuild there for the Jubilee (Image 9). The competitors felt a similar lack of need to establish a presence in Tiverton, even though it was three times larger than Huxley, because it was better-located, being under two miles from two places offering outlets of all three denominations. The Prims had even less cause to build, because they had a total of four local outlets, at Tarporley, Bunbury, Spurstow and of course Huxley, each under two miles distant. Yet Tiverton's Prims built a remarkably jaunty chapel of their own in 1864 (Image 10). Seeing both chapels leaves the unmistakeable impression that internal competition, not a desire to steal a march on other denominations, was the impulse here.

Even without taking account of several other nearby PM chapels, these two examples make it hard to accept the image of an oppressed denomination or of one dogged, during the era they were built, by either a lack of funds or assertiveness; but they underline how the rash of local congregations failed to produce any large chapels. Cash was a problem for all Nonconformists; the impact of the decline in membership status identified in the baptismal data means that it was a bigger issue for the Prims; but it did not prevent them from expending on chapels. Another local instance elsewhere in Cheshire supports the hypothesis that the Prims had a different balance of priorities from their competitors as

⁴⁹ Huxley's Anglican church dates from 1888.

⁵⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p 551.

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

between raising status and expansionism: in Sandbach circuit, despite having one chapel in financial difficulty (at Ettiley Heath, another instance of a chapel built very close to an existing one, being only a mile from the head chapel of the circuit) the circuit steward was still regularly sending small donations to distant congregations to assist in funding new chapels.⁵¹

Yet one good set of comparative images and costings for Barrow-in-Furness confirms that the plainness of the PM chapel is not simply about funding anyway. The cost gap between the rather demure Gothic Congregational chapel erected at Abbey Road/Ainslie Street in 1877 and the uncompromisingly Classical 1874 PM chapel at Hartington Street (Image 11) is only 9%, yet the Gothic one looks much more expensive, as does the PM's own essay into Gothic in nearby Marsh Street, built the following year, which is a fair match (despite its dilapidation when photographed – Image 12) and it cost even less than Hartington Street.⁵² These images underline that Jobson's 1850 claim was not merely propaganda; but it also adds to the saliency of the question as to why the denomination stuck with their increasingly old-fashioned designs.

CHAPEL EVOLUTION

Exploring the refusal to adopt Gothic must be a key element of any attempt to explain the evolution of the PM chapel; but the best starting-point is with a very different structure, the oldest surviving example of a PM chapel, indeed one of the first built by the movement, at

⁵¹ Sandbach PM Chapel (later circuit) Accounts, Chester Record Office, EMS 221/2.

⁵² The image of the Congregational chapel cannot be reproduced here because the copyright holder is unknown. Both it and the 1900 replacement may however be viewed at <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/LAN/BarrowinFurness/Emmanuel.shtml>. The 1877 chapel is the smaller building on the side-road and cost £5.30 per seat. Hartington St chapel cost £4.60 per seat, whereas Marsh St was cheaper, at £4.20. Costs and capacities from Mannex & Co, *History and directory of Furness and West Cumberland*, Preston, 1882.

Cloud. It stands on the Staffordshire flanks of the sandstone hill of the same name, and dates from 1815. The legend, already touched upon, is that the miserly cost of £26 was begged in three days with the chapel erected in three weeks. A modern view of the chapel (Image 13) may therefore come as something of a surprise.

It is unfortunately an oblique image, because the chapel stands high on the east-facing side of the hill, partially obscured from below. It is a simple three-bay chapel with round-headed windows, built of regular courses of sandstone, with low windows thanks to the raised pulpit and level auditorium; yet the stonework finish to the eaves, and the massive corbelled inverse ogees that complete them are indicative of quality workmanship. A line-drawing of the chapel as it appeared in the nineteenth century confirms that – with the exception of overhead telephone wires, aluminium guttering and an ugly late twentieth-century brick vestibule (not captured in the oblique image) – the only material change is re-fenestration which has done away with the fan section atop each window.⁵³ None is exactly an improvement.

What, though, neither that image nor indeed a modern photograph can capture is how Cloud would have looked when built in 1815. The Cloud sandstone of which it is built, when freshly-cut, is almost salmon-pink in colour, and is particularly durable. It glows, particularly in sunshine after a rain-shower. This premium product was not cheap, and if the chapel had been the work of indigent men, the best they might have hoped for was the quarry's cast-offs. These stones were not, and cannot have been funded from within that £26 figure.

⁵³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 170.

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

This is clear from a nearby Wesleyan competitor, of which, alas, no modern image is available. The old connexion built its chapel in the locality in 1821, at Key Green on the Cheshire flank of the Cloud. Sold off in the 20th century, it was enlarged in 1954 and is unrecognisable within a modern structure, Sycamore Cottage. The May 2010 occupant was the owner when that occurred, and has confirmed that the original structure was slightly larger than Cloud and built of the same stone. It was a rubble church, without finely finished reveals.⁵⁴ Wesleyan records confirm that this modest chapel cost £94; that excluded the cost of land, and took no account of either the free labour or the supply of lime for the mortar. The cost is much lower than for an already featured Shropshire stone chapel of the same size built later that decade (Image 2, Bomere Heath Presbyterian, at £227 in 1827); although only part of that may be the result of the non-cash element of the Cheshire chapel. The rubble used for it would have cost significantly less than the finished stonework at Bomere Heath. That is a little larger than Cloud, but while the stone blocks are larger, the stone itself is of indifferent quality, unlike Cloud's, and the Gothic windows that are such an attractive feature are a late 19th century alteration: the original had plain rectangular windows. Maybe the true cost of Cloud chapel was less than Bomere Heath; but it was surely much higher than that for Key Green, itself understated thanks to donations in kind. In 1845, the Wesleyans decided to replace the Key Green chapel, at a cost of £345 excluding land. It is a building (Image 14) that has so many features in common with Cloud, such as the corbelled decorative finish to the eaves, that it is hard not to conclude that the Wesleyans were stung into a competitive response second time round: perhaps they had calculated that if the Prims did not last, the 1815 chapel would fall into their laps. If so, they knew that that would not be the case by 1845, and their design replicates Cloud's, with the same sandstone and round-headed windows, but seeks to outdo it in the quality of the masonry. It succeeds, with attractive reeded architraves and a

⁵⁴ In private correspondence in the possession of the author.

carefully crafted date-stone; but then few second chapels fail to outdo those built a generation earlier.

Discourse aside, Cloud's low cost and funding method are puzzling. The members included a JP, and the congregation had met in the farmhouse of a supportive farmer prior to the chapel being built.⁵⁵ Cloud, indeed, featured in Bourne's travels before the connexion came into being, thanks to the efforts of local activist farmers. Here, there can be no certainty, because there are no records available, but around this time much of the movement's mission was undertaken by self-supporting activists, and Bourne was very close to Peter Phillips, a man committed to free gospel (i.e., unpaid ministry). There are hints in the diaries and other accounts that the early Prims expected God to provide, and not just for the immediate sustenance of the itinerants.⁵⁶ They were often expected to rely upon the charity of those impressed with their message for both hospitality and venues in order to open up new areas, and by and large, they succeeded. So when the congregation embarked upon the venture, perhaps their ability to build the chapel on charity was their way of confirming that God smiled on their efforts, not a sign of their indigence.

Cloud is much more isolated than an 1814 Wesleyan country chapel at Ellerdine Heath in Shropshire (Image 15), built by benefaction.⁵⁷ The image shows the chapel as extended in the 1830s, save only for replacement windows, which sit in the original reveals. The method of extension is informative. This building originally had the two-window 'propriety' that often marked out the early meeting-house, and in order to accommodate a gallery and staircase, was extended by raising the vestibule section to full height. The

⁵⁵ Abner Dale, JP, is mentioned approvingly by Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 123; he and Thomas Bayley were key figures in the build project, and both merited representations later in the same volume, p. 171.

⁵⁶ For example, Kendall (vol i) cites instances of claimed divine intervention, both against opponents (p. 269) and in the provision of venues in times of crisis such as the loss of the Scotter chapel and its rapid replacement (p. 433).

⁵⁷ Information supplied by the chapel treasurer during a visit in 2009.

slightly different colouration of the bricks, starting at the level of the upper window sill, marks the area added. The builder could have stripped out the original vestibule window and produced a symmetrical three-bay frontage, but went for the much cheaper option, leaving the curious window arrangement.⁵⁸ Thus a side-on chapel of eighteenth-century inspiration (even if built the year before Waterloo) was now an uninspiring vernacular country building, thanks to an extension dictated by practicality and budgets, with little thought to design or image. However, even after stripping out the extension effect, Ellerdine Heath is no match for Cloud, either in terms of materials or design.

The next-oldest surviving PM structure found is the former Englesea Brook chapel that now houses the connexional museum (Image 6). It dates from 1828, and was featured previously to underline the time-dependent nature of the rating system. It offers a particularly cogent comparison with Ellerdine Heath. It was less well-endowed, since only the land (and perhaps some labour) was donated; and like the Shropshire chapel it too needed to be extended. Only four years after opening, the congregation readily countenanced an extension, but they did not follow the Ellerdine Heath approach: that would have seen a staircase added on the spot where the 1914 schoolroom stands. Instead, they built forward seven feet just where the land level drops off rapidly, and then erected an even taller front wall, adding to the foundation-work required; and just in case it did not look impressive enough that wall was projected a few inches sideways and raised eighteen inches above the new roof-line to add to its visual presence, facing down to the centre of the village.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ This is not unique: another Wesleyan chapel shows a similar disregard for appearance in its extended form: see www.moston.org/churches.html and follow navigation for Lower Withington.

⁵⁹ Christopher Stell (compiler), *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in the North of England*, London, 1994, p. 34.

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

Neither Cloud nor Englesea Brook can be regarded as the product of an impoverished congregation; and in a different way, nor can Hull Mill Street, featured earlier. No known photographic image of the original building has survived, but a poor line-drawing appeared in Kendall's *History*. It is reproduced here (Image 16), and for comparison purposes modern photographs of two contemporary neighbours built by the Wesleyans at South Cave (1816, Image 17) and Congregationalists at Cottingham (1819, Image 18) are shown. A visual comparison of that chapel with its nearest competitors in time and place gives no grounds for decrying it, and thus confirms the cost evidence cited previously.

In describing these early chapels, Kendall was giving the 'modern' view of the early movement; he was not describing a balanced and contextualised reality. The Prims did, of course, build some modest chapels and appear to have done so increasingly in the middle decades of the century. That aligns with a dip in member status as measured by baptismal evidence, but that may not be the whole story, if the example of Madeley, Staffordshire, is representative. The cause began in the early 1850s, before the colliery boom in the area. Madeley already had two religious outlets: an Anglican church funded by the Crewe estate and an 1820 Wesleyan chapel. Both sit to the west of what is now the village centre, which is dominated by the former millpond; but the village migrated east thanks to the arrival of the main Birmingham-Manchester railway. The Wesleyan chapel sat in its shadow, and its marginal siting meant that the PM chapel was preferred under unification. It was opened in 1856, and in 1909 the debt was a total of £150 – on a chapel that had cost £150 to build. That year saw the replacement of the original loans by a mortgage in favour of the Chapel Aid society. By then, it was known as the 'Miner's Chapel' and this was reflected in its trustees: a shoemaker, one greengrocer, a labourer and ten miners, all

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

residents of Madeley.⁶⁰ Little wonder, then, that the observer sees here evidence of a hard-up collection of miners unable to do more than service the interest burden on the debt.⁶¹ It echoes the Neaves' view that debt was unwisely incurred in East Yorkshire. Yet a more circumspect examination would suggest that the same judgement is inappropriate here. After 1909, the entire debt was cleared in just over a decade. This did not signal a change in congregational wealth; it was the result of a dramatic shift in financial priorities. Over the preceding 53 years, the trustees had spent their surpluses on expansion, extending Madeley chapel twice and replacing its frontage for no reason other than to improve its appearance; and at the same time the circuit could build further chapels at Onneley, Higher Madeley and Leycett within the original catchment area.

In the Neave view, the world of bring-and-buy sales, congregational teas, annual galas, and sales of seats were the inevitable consequence of over-extending borrowing, even if those things happened then to prove to be important elements of the chapel's role in the life of the community. Not at Madeley: paying down the debt was the last thing on the trustees' minds. There were souls to save, and they were in the new mining villages springing up around Keele Bank. Rather as with a decision to mortgage to the hilt in the 1970s and today, what seems financially imprudent now was sensible, indeed necessary, then.

There is one feature of the Madeley loans that tends to support this reading: the trustees were regarded as a good risk by lenders. The bulk of the loan was advanced by an Anglican rector, and he was unlikely to have acted out of sympathy with the builders' goals. The original trustees were men of rather greater substance than their 1909

⁶⁰ Chapel facts from Newcastle-under-Lyme Archives, Bundle EE, held at the town's public Library, Ironmarket, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire.

⁶¹ This was certainly the tone of a collaborative publication of MA studies of the village: Joseph Kennedy, (ed.), *Madeley: A History of a Staffordshire Parish*, Keele, 1970.

successors: they included the farmer who provided the balance of the loan and two or three businessmen from adjacent congregations. This system of church planting was a consistent PM practice (and echoed earlier Wesleyan behaviour), and an earlier instance was even more pronounced. A third of Madeley's 1856 trustees were incomers, whereas at Cabourne, in Lincolnshire, only two of the nine inaugural 1854 trustees were locals; and all nine were either farmers or small businessmen.⁶² The successor trustees comprised only Cabourne men and several of them were labourers, much as at Madeley. While some of the decline was a consequence of this church planting behaviour, where prosperous incomers stepped back after establishing a cause, the consistency of the pattern of decline in the mid-century, discussed in Chapter 9 (where decline applied whether these were pathfinder or successor trustees), suggests that it could not account for all of the cases.

As the century progressed, the PM chapel became increasingly differentiated from its fellows. Both the baptismal evidence and the costs trends over the century indicate that affordability may have been an issue, yet the foregoing is much less indicative of this being the result of a poor denomination falling further and further behind its competitors. One hint that this may have been the implied policy of spending the least possible rather than the maximum available – and why that policy was held so dear – emerges from mission-rooms. The home missionary effort of both PM and Wesleyan connexions included local mission-rooms and Central Halls; but the latter's mix of welfare, administrative and secular support activities to encourage the unchurched into welcoming but well-appointed city-centre facilities was always more a Wesleyan than a Primitive Methodist initiative. The Prims remained true to type by preferring the mission-room: local and low-key. The Wesleyan examples were generally very plain, and are probably fairly characterised by the Durham Street mission in Scarborough, previously cited, and reproduced as Image 19.

⁶² Lincolnshire Archives, Meth/C/Cabourne/D.

But for the plaque over the door, this would be difficult to identify as a religious building. The abiding impression is of a building desperately trying *not* to look like a chapel. Two PM examples from a little later, the impressive Pennington Memorial Mission Hall in Kendal (Image 20) and the more typical Bradfield Road Mission-Room, Crewe (Image 21) both dating from 1899, provide a very different image. Any observer who fails to read the text in the gable would assume that these were chapels, but might not immediately connect the distinguished Kendal example with the Prims. Not so the Crewe building: a stranger seeking a PM chapel in 1900 would immediately have recognised Bradfield Road, thanks to the details which by then were almost a cliché for the denomination: the discreetly decorative brickwork to the slightly swept eaves; the rash of commemorative plaques that signalled the cash-raising effort that had accompanied the build; and most of all the window design. It allows an insight into how the PM chapel design progressively emerged and how, therefore, a common start-point produced a differentiated result by the close of the Victorian era.

The Classical version had been the design of choice for Nonconformists of the early nineteenth-century and while it lent itself to the 'preaching barn', its fundamental purpose was to announce the building's public status. Almost immediately, a prominent centre emerged to dominate the flanks of the building's face, and applied across all denominations. One early example was the Wesleyan chapel in Whitchurch, Shropshire (Image 22). Its Venetian-inspired window (discussed below) added to the impact of the projecting central section, only partly offset by the large flanking windows, but the process was unstoppable: the Cheltenham Wesleyan chapel of 1839 (Image 23) shows that the doorway has become the main architectural statement. There is also a clear contention between the Methodist disavowal of a central aisle, and an apparent preference for odd-

numbered window arrangements with three as the theme. This was usually achieved in larger chapels by grouping three central windows in a hierarchically dominant centre (for five-bay arrangements), and more rarely then pairing off side windows for seven-bay ones. Yet as the subsequent Newark chapel (Wesleyan, 1846, Image 24) underlines, the odd number arrangement was an aesthetic preference only; when practical considerations demanded it, the twin door arrangement might readily be resolved in a four-bay frontage, and its builder, James Simpson, was a particular exponent of the four-bay chapel,⁶³ although he was not the first to employ it.⁶⁴

Nor was he the last: 40 years later (and 22 years after Simpson's death), the Wesleyans built another four-bay chapel at Tonge, Greater Manchester (Image 25). The massive central bay could readily have been designed as a three-bay centre with flanking single windows, and indeed the vestibule windows flanking the doorway in the central bay show that; but the builders opted to destroy the three-aspect centre, preferring to stick to a design that echoed the appearance of the 1868 chapel it replaced. The immediate response to Tonge is that it was not Gothic, some 35 years or so after Jobson's blast against the pagan character of this 'civic' design; yet a more subtle denial is on view. The popularity of four-bay designs indicate that the Wesleyans attached no symbolic significance to three-aspect symmetry in their Classical chapels.

The Congregational estate raced to Gothic so quickly that the opportunity to develop such a style did not occur. The development of the dominant centre is discernible but less pronounced, although there is one glorious exception in the very early neo-Baroque chapel at Carlisle Lowther Street (1843, Image 26). The projecting central bay, the colonnaded

⁶³ It was far from his first: that was ten years earlier, at Low Road Hunslet, and he also built to the same four-bay design elsewhere in 1839: Serjeant, 'Simpson', pp. 146-7.

⁶⁴ For example, Stamford Bridge, ERY, 1828: Neave, *East Yorkshire*, p. 57.

doorway, elevated lintel to the central window, and the decorative pediment all draw the eye to the greater importance of the centre over the flanks. So increasingly, the non-Gothic Nonconformist chapel was designed in accordance with ordinary aesthetic and practical considerations in mind: even when chapel-builders opted for Classical designs, the Jobson argument triumphed. By the mid-Victorian era, only Gothic had the mark of Christian, as distinct from public, respectability for the rest of Nonconformity.

When however the same sort of examination is conducted on the PM estate a different picture emerges. The buildings that offer the best clues are the larger ones that provided the greatest opportunities to the builder. Unlike the Wesleyans, the PMs seem to have actively avoided four-bay designs. Of the 23 largest Classical chapels found after 1850, eight went for an oversize three-bay design, nine more adopted a five-bay design, with six instances of a four bay arrangement.⁶⁵ Every one of the five-bay designs managed to produce a three-aspect frontage, by use of one or more visual tricks: a modified Venetian window cluster; height and/or width differentials; dominant central tablets; and echoes of lintels or string courses in masonry. Individually or collectively these draw the eye to the centre. The same approach usually produced the appearance of a three-bay chapel among the four-bay instances, but the 1880 chapel at Staithes, North Yorkshire (Image 27), has an architectural double-bluff: it is a four-bay chapel as shown by the ground-floor fenestration, but by squeezing in a third window in the two central bays – in a modified triple array, with the central window dominant – it appears to be a five-bay design with a three-aspect core. Placing a central notice-board between the ground-floor windows completes the illusion. Staithes worked hard to achieve an end ignored at Newark and

⁶⁵ The data here refer only to dated chapels: there is at least one example of a six-bay chapel of uncertain date at Hyde, Greater Manchester, although that too uses *trompe l'oeil* effects to produce a three-aspect frontage. The four-bay chapel not further cited in the text is at Dawley, Shropshire; it was a four-bay chapel, as shown by its first-floor fenestration, but a doorway was squeezed between flanking windows to try to create the appearance of a five-bay building.

actively avoided at Tonge. It underlines the difference in design priorities between the Wesleyans and Prims. A final four-bay instance was the previously-cited 1874 Hartington Street chapel, in Barrow-in-Furness (Image 11). The first floor window array confirms its original appearance; the three-aspect frontage appears to be a later addition – but still, probably Victorian, given the appearance of the bricks. While it may simply be the exception that proves the rule, the vestibule may have been an attempt to reintroduce a PM ‘propriety’ to a chapel that had departed from it. With the exception of Hartington Street, all of these later chapels infringe the Palladian balance principle, using decoration, width, height, window shapes and differential spacing to mark out a dominant centre.

Tracing the emergence of Venetian-inspired windows provides an insight into how that occurred. Bradfield’s window is a derivation of the Venetian window array of a central round-headed light with sidelights under a horizontal lintel. Architecturally purer examples are to be seen in Wesleyan chapels at Hayfield, Derbyshire (1780, Image 28) and as noted above at Whitchurch, Shropshire (1810, Image 22);⁶⁶ and echoes are to be seen in a single late Wesleyan, and an early Congregational example.⁶⁷ There are a small number of instances of triple clusters of round-headed windows (the style is to be seen in Tiverton PM chapel, Image 10) in the Wesleyan and Congregationalist estates, but they are outnumbered by twin or quadruple arrays.

By contrast, Bradfield was the fourth of five instances of interpretive Venetian window arrays in PM chapels: an attractive if imprecise example at Shrewsbury Street, Glossop, 1855; an accurate one at Chorley, 1866; one featuring extended flanking windows at

⁶⁶ Dr Wakeling warned that Hayfield’s Venetian window might be Edwardian in date; this was confirmed by personal inspection, 4th May 2012, which indicated that the window reveal and porch are both later than and built of different stone from the rest of the building, as indicated by the differing keystone design and the delamination of the ashlar of the verticals in the Venetian window. Yet this was clearly an attempt to integrate the later work by means of a deliberately ‘old-fashioned’ design.

⁶⁷ Congregational, at Swanland, 1803, and Wesleyan, at Foston, 1879: Neave, *East Riding*, pp. 9 and 62.

Brindley Ford, 1889; and finally a radical departure at Leyland, 1892 (Images 29-32 inclusive). In addition, there are 24 instances of the modified form of the clustered triple arch. The first detected triple-array round-headed window appeared towards the end of the 1840s, at Northorpe (Image 33). It contrasted sharply with chapels such as Welsh Row, Nantwich (Image 34), where the refusal to become a four-bay arrangement produces a plain result. Five triple-array versions accompanied Glossop's Venetian example in the 1850s. Tiverton was one of five triple-array central windows that accompanied Chorley, Lancashire, in the 1860s; another notable instance was that at Lingwood (Image 35) which underlines a dominant centre.⁶⁸ The 12 chapels with triple-arch arrays (including Venetian) in the 1860s and 1870s represented the peak: the 1880s saw only four, and the 1890s three. So, during the half-century when the Prims drew back from Gothic, the triple-window design had an insistent saliency for the Prims, but not for others.⁶⁹ It echoes the equally firm resolve to try to hang on to three-aspect symmetry in the masonry.

How there should have emerged such common commitment to this design ethos is mildly surprising in a denomination with poor central control, little standing administrative machinery until very late in the Victorian era, and a tradition of District resistance to central interference. More surprising though is why it happened. It was not the presence of some design aesthetic or delicacy that other denominations lacked, because competitors occasionally featured the same effects; the issue here is the *insistence* with which the Prims adopted the style. In the absence of better data and analysis, this thesis can offer no more than a highly speculative suggestion: the three-aspect design, which first emerged as a practical by-product of a small 'proper' building, may have come to be seen by the Prims –

⁶⁸ Lingwood is shown in some sources as dating from the 1830s, but it was a replacement chapel for the one listed in the 1851 Religious Census.

⁶⁹ Dr Wakeling has observed that the 10 identifiable PM chapels in the borough of Derby (a further five erected before 1914 have left no surviving image for analytical purposes) included four that featured the triple window array.

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

but not others headed to Gothic – as an evocation of the Trinity. One small chapel mentioned already on several occasions seems to sum up the design ethos: Tiverton (Image 10). The central window array represents one Trinity; it also forms the centre of a larger one within the entire fabric of the chapel's public face. The masonry swag sets the entire chapel off.

It would help to explain an oddity in the grudging subsequent edging towards Gothic. Where the window array sits within a steeply-pitched roof, there are sound cost as well as aesthetic reasons to favour a high central window either alone or flanked by subordinates. Yet at Bradshaw chapel, Tottington, the 1890 chapel (Image 36) was effectively Classical in outline, with medium roof pitch and decorative finials; the builder bowed to the inevitable, and chose Gothic windows, arrayed in pairs along the long wall. The roof pitch did not demand the high central window, yet the frontage has not one but four Trinitarian motifs: a high cluster of small windows as homage to Venetian; a central cluster of a double-width window flanked by subordinates, the ensemble in turn flanked by paired side windows at lower level; then between those lower windows a central doorway flanked with its own vestibule windows. Judged as an example of chapel Gothic, Bradshaw is an untutored and disappointing aping of an alien form by people who know no better; seen as the grim commitment to the three-aspect motif, it is a very distinctive example of the PM vision.

The commitment to this motif, beginning as the Prims abandoned Gothic and reaching prominence only as they began to dabble again with it, would help to explain why the denomination returned to Gothic so hesitantly. Perhaps by then the Classical design, had offered an alternative means of expressing the religious nature and character of the PM chapel. Perhaps, too, this collective, implicit preference reflected something of the

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

movement's inward-looking nature: a design that was unremarkable to the uninitiated was a sacred form for many Prims, and all the more precious because of its hidden character.

Two neighbouring chapels built at Middleton-in-Teesdale, County Durham, within two years of one another, one WM, one PM, encapsulate the movement's stylistic distinctiveness. They are associated as Images 37 and 38. Both are five-bay and a clear rejection of Gothic; but the Wesleyan chapel is a low-impact building dictated by practical considerations hence the four-aspect ground floor frontage to allow a two-aisle layout, undermining the impact of the projecting central section. By contrast, the PM chapel built in 1872 uses the same essential design to emphasise its three-aspect character despite the five equally-sized first-floor windows, placing a single door centrally between flanking windows and emphasising the centre by the same projection as seen in the Wesleyan chapel; but here the finials adorning the roof leave no doubt about the integrity of the design. Its Grade 2 listing reflects the additional care taken with the window architraves and entrance that has produced its more satisfying integrity. It is a particularly refined example of a Prim chapel and the movement's resistance to Gothic.

SUMMARY

These various strands explain the prevalence, yet highlight the inappropriateness, of the usual view of the Prim chapel. The Prim preference for Classical causes its estate to look unchurchy; and that is enhanced by the issue of differential survival, which has seen a high proportion of its larger Gothic buildings disappear. Meanwhile, the connexional taste for many small chapels has slowed down the rate at which older examples, especially in smaller communities, were replaced, extended, or modernised. At the same time, the financial behaviour that accompanied this – preferring to spend money on planting new

Chapter 8: The Primitive Methodist Chapel

congregations, rather than paying off debt – can appear to have been because of the members' poverty. The essential character of the denomination was not its shortage of funds, although its resources relative to its competitors were never generous, but its progressively unjustified optimism about future growth. The hardship image is assisted by the denomination's own accounts, which heroically magnified the adversity character of the early years, and overemphasised the early vernacular chapel design, of which relatively few were built. That was accepted rather too readily by later observers; and the effect has been to divert attention away from the many accomplished, interesting and sometimes quirky buildings that represent the true heart of the PM estate.

Yet two things stand out: neither the design of the Primitive Methodist chapel, nor the pattern of its rollout, displays a denomination whose actions were driven by hardship or held back by a stunted aesthetic. The design was a product of collective, if informal and uncoordinated, intention. It just happens not to fit too well with our idea of what the Victorian chapel should look like. The rollout was produced by a combination of unrealistic ambition, uncontrolled localism and missionary imperative. Together they return attention to the people who made the decisions about these buildings, and these form the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

This chapter examines the leadership that created and built the movement. Apart from Bourne and Clowes, the founding figures left no written records, and thanks to the contemporary convention of concentrating on the religious lives of subjects while ignoring their secular circumstances, biographies and obituaries were uniformly hagiographic and uninformative. Also, the deaths of some early senior figures prompted little or no recording anyway: editorial selection often meant that attention was directed to humble individuals who offered didactic opportunities. More immediately though, the Prims' discourse led writers to downplay the secular advantages of individuals, and the need to tread warily around the ongoing guerrilla warfare between Bourne and Clowes gave the Prims a taste for discretion amounting to concealment.

The resulting record can trap the unwary, as the example of Hannah Yeomans demonstrates. Although celebrated as a 'lowly heroine' of great but simple piety,¹ Hannah held no office or position within the movement. She was the wife of an agricultural labourer and was born around 1785, featuring in Bourne's diaries in 1813.² Her circumstances were, however, modest rather than poor,³ and her home was regularly used as free accommodation for travelling preachers; this was one of the many ways that the Prims were able to operate at much lower cost than competitors.⁴ She featured in an article in *The Aldersgate Magazine* of 1900 fondly remembering an earlier era, written by an itinerant named Charles Boden whose ministry began only in 1860, by which time

¹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 176.

² Bourne Journals, Wednesday March 3rd, 1813, F f. 215. There were two women named Hannah Yeomans resident there recorded in the 1861 Census. They were neighbours married to agricultural labourers aged 11 years apart, and thus probably brothers; but at that time the women were 85 and 62; so the latter can be eliminated as she would have been too young to be the married woman appearing in the 1813 Journals.

³ Hannah died in late 1862 or early 1863 with no recorded will, but her husband left a modest amount, probate being granted to a son, who was a farmer nearby. (Census ref RG9/2519/63/11; Probate Calendar 1866.)

⁴ Thus, for example, when James Simpson recorded the costs, capacity and seat rent costs for chapels he had built for four denominations, the typical seat rent was set at around one-eighth of the capital cost; the Prims only needed to charge about one-fourteenth – Serjeant, 'Simpson', p. 156.

Hannah was 85. This was then used by Deborah Valenze.⁵ In it she saw evidence of the Prims as a bastion of cottage worship, and a haven for women against their subordination to men, although she recognised it as the product of artistic licence and rearranging of facts: Boden referred to Hannah's son in terms that implied he was a child or adolescent, although he had long left the family home; and the image of rural isolation is wide of the mark. Although Rodsley itself had no PM outlet as late as 1851, Boylestone's 1811 chapel was under three miles away (not an excessive distance in country districts); while a cottage venue a mile away at Shirley was in operation before 1851; and two other dedicated chapels were about a mile and a half away at Thurstaston (opened 1839) and Hollington (1847). The latter venue had had a PM Sunday School as early as 1817.⁶ So Hannah's domestic piety was not due to isolation; more reasonably, Boden had failed to recognise the fact of public patriarchy concealing domestic matriarchy among Britain's working class, movingly told by Richard Hoggart, who made the long journey from working-class Leeds to university professorship in the mid-20th century.⁷ The phenomenon escaped the notice of British middle-class observers including Boden, so it is perhaps easy to understand that it escaped Valenze too. Interestingly, the Prims had long realised the anthropological challenge faced by itinerants dealing with their congregations. The PM Magazine's 1845 'advice to travelling preachers' – a continuing theme in the magazines both before and after Bourne's era – counselled the itinerant to

never speak coldly to a villager because you have seen him...employed in an humbler sphere than your own...shake him cordially by the hand, ask him of his welfare, and let him be convinced that your enquiry is not ceremonious, but dictated by the outgoings of an affectionate heart...Remember that the souls of [such men] are as precious in the sight of God as those of Monarchs.⁸

⁵ Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters*, p. 43.

⁶ Tranter, *Derbyshire*, various; also Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 175 and 118 for original Boylestone PM and Hollington's Sunday school dates.

⁷ Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, 1958, p. 33ff.

⁸ *PMM*, 1845, p. 240, more fully quoted in Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 104.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

Hannah's domination of her domestic world was echoed in many working-class households, whether Evangelical, or of no faith; it was not the Prims' gift to Hannah and her female peers.

Meanwhile, the discourse reduced some weighty figures in the movement to caricatures. John Benton was prosperous, with interests in collieries and land in South Staffordshire. He itinerated at his own expense, bankrolled two others, commissioned 1000 hymn-books for use in his travels, and funded three chapels; Kendall notes that he was at least as well off as his wife, who inherited £1000 (a lifetime's earnings for a labourer) from her yeoman father.⁹ Yet Kendall introduces him as follows: 'his sincere piety and zeal were able to triumph over all the disadvantages of illiteracy and natural defects'. These defects were unspecified beyond Kendall's repeated descriptions of him as having 'little grammar and not much command of language'.¹⁰ Benton features only briefly, because he was seriously indisposed in May 1818, and after recovery did not return to active evangelism. Kendall denied any suggestion that Benton's non-resumption signalled some alienation; he might usefully have remarked that there was no place in the post-1819 movement for a maverick who went where the mood, not the plan, took him. Benton remained a Prim sympathiser, and his family were active supporters of the movement, but he returned to farm at Costock, where he died in 1856.¹¹

John Wedgwood was similarly underplayed. His biography tells us much about his religious doings, but little about the man, his family circumstances, and secular situation.¹²

Kendall's briefer description reads as follows.

⁹ Kendall, *Origin*, i, passim but especially p. 354.

¹⁰ Ibid., i, p. 96, then pp. 97, 185, and 299.

¹¹ Ibid., i, pp. 355-6.

¹² Thomas Bateman, *Memoir of the Life and Labours of Mr. John Wedgwood... by a Layman*, London, 1870.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

Diligent inquiry has failed to reward us with a clear outline of Wedgwood's early life, as seems to have been the case with all previous biographers.¹³

Yet he later reports that he was described, on arriving to preach in South Cheshire, as 'a great gentleman out of the Potteries'.¹⁴ His circumstances were no great secret. The following items were in the public domain: his date of birth; father's status (gentleman, and thus probably a rentier) and will provisions (assets left to his widow in her lifetime, with John as co-trustee, the estate then to be divided equally among the six surviving children or their issue); John's claimed marriage to a relative of William Clowes, probably his younger sister; and his attested marriage to Hannah Hand at Boylestone in February 1840. Most of this appeared in an Edwardian work.¹⁵ He was recorded in the 1841 Census as a Wesleyan Minister, visiting his mother and businessman brother at the family home in the Potteries.¹⁶ Ten years on, he was at home in Boylestone, when described as an Independent Minister, together with his wife Hannah, a dressmaker; and in 1861 at Crewe, when he self-described as a Methodist preacher and she as a 'proprietor of houses' and having 'interest of money'.¹⁷ John was a remunerated itinerant 1829-32, and both Kendall and Ritson hint that by then he needed the income.¹⁸ But it is unlikely that he benefited by remarrying well. Hannah's father, a farmer of 64 acres, died some time in the 1850s; his widow was described as an annuitant thereafter, suggesting that she had a life interest in his estate;¹⁹ so Hannah is unlikely to have inherited any money until her mother's death in the 1880s. Her translation from dress-maker to rentier in the 1850s was unlikely to have been courtesy of her father; but it coincides with the probable death of John's mother in

¹³ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 164.

¹⁴ Quoted from an unknown source by Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 511-2.

¹⁵ Josiah Wedgwood, *A History of the Wedgwood Family*, London, 1908, pp. 139-140.

¹⁶ In the 1841 Census, Wedgwood's wife was recorded as staying with her farmer father and mother, but appears *after* the domestic servant, suggesting that she was a visitor: HO107/179/9, ED3/7/8/23.

¹⁷ Successive Census references are HO 107/987/11/15; HO107/2010/3; RG9/2615/92/17.

¹⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 514; Ritson, *Romance*, p. 108.

¹⁹ John Hand, 1851 Census: HO107/2010/574/16; death not traced, but his wife is a widow in 1861: RG9/1957/22/2; an annuitant in 1871: RG10/2895/25/5; then finally mother-in-law lodging with her remarried daughter in 1881: RG11/2848/70/25.

1852.²⁰ It would seem that he passed his inheritance to her to look after. One thing, though, is certain: Hannah was not the funding source that enabled John to return to unpaid itinerancy in 1832, because she was only 19 at that time. More feasibly, Wedgwood became a salaried itinerant in the wake of the more stringent rules of 1828 in order to continue to operate, unlike Benton who retired rather than return under the 1819 regime.

Wedgwood died in Crewe in 1869. His widow remarried a widowed PM itinerant, John Porter, the following year and the 1881 Census finds them in West Bromwich.²¹ Shortly thereafter, Porter was back in Crewe, where he too died; his will was proved at Chester in 1884 at a value of £1402; it placed him on the 95th percentile by value of those dying in the last four decades of the century.²² He was not enriched to that degree by itinerancy, but nor did it come from family sources: his bachelor brother who had inherited the small shoemaking business of the father, left an estate proved at under £200, the same value as that of his first wife.²³ The rest, no doubt, came from Hannah: her movable assets were rather lower when she died in 1892, but the probate venue of London suggests that her fixed property assets were considerable, or at least complicated in terms of disposal. Bateman may not have known about the widow's future when he wrote the biography, but he cannot have been in any doubt about her economic circumstances, and her subsequent marriage to a PM itinerant cannot have been a secret from Kendall: it took place in the Wedgwood Memorial Chapel in Crewe.²⁴ Wedgwood's financial situation is, in itself,

²⁰ John's mother does not appear in the 1851 Census, but the only traced death of a person of that name occurred in the third quarter of 1852, according to on-line searches of the Registrar-General's lists.

²¹ The International Genealogical Index records the marriage as having occurred on 15th June 1870, at the Wedgwood Chapel, Crewe.

²² See later discussion in this chapter on comparative probate values.

²³ National Probate Calendar 1871, Charles Porter of Higher Wych, Cheshire; Calendar 1865, Martha Porter (first wife). John Porter acted as executor for both.

²⁴ There is a substantial website devoted to the extended Wedgwood family:
<http://www.familyhistorian.info/exciting/wedgwood/index.html>

merely interesting; but it underlines the dangers of reading denominational testimony in an uncritical manner.

Accordingly, the approach here has been to seek evidence about people who were organisationally important, rather than merely notable; but to seek it from sources besides those of the connexion's own writings. The resulting cast of characters is slender. Very little is known about James Steele, his cousins, Joseph and John Smith, the six unnamed gentleman members of the congregation who put up by way of loan the entire cost of the 1830 chapel in St Ives, or the men who did likewise to fund the building of Hull's first chapel.²⁵ Benton, a funder by way of loans of three chapels was outdone by a further three men who either fully funded or gifted the land for three chapels each, as briefly noted in Chapter 8. Little besides these men's names is now known, and the same is true for the following members of the BRC besides Steele, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes: John Andrew, Thomas Batty, John Hallam, John Hancock, David Paisley, and Thomas Steele (James's son).²⁶ Andrew and Steele left the connexion relatively young; Hancock attracted a biography, which is cited but does not appear in any archival or library searches; and the secular circumstances of the remainder are thought to be modest. Hancock was a businessman whose finances were dangerously entangled with those of the Connexion, as discussed in Chapter 5. That leaves only three figures. John Walford was a farmer and maltster, although not a particularly prosperous one, to judge by the fate of the eldest son.²⁷ He took over the malting business but within a decade was a carter; a decade later an agricultural labourer.

²⁵ St Ives data: Noall, *History of St Ives Fore Street*. Hull data: Hatcher, PM in Hull, p. 154.

²⁶ The pivotal role and changing membership of the BRC was discussed in Chapter 5.

²⁷ Successive Census refs: HO107/118/21/7 (farmer and maltster); HO107/2169/428/3 (maltster); RG9/2165/19/7 (now a builder; the maltster business passed to the son, James); (James, 1871 and subsequent) RG10/3861/10/17 and RG11/3940/92/37.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

Charles Abraham was a more substantial figure. Born in Lincolnshire, he arrived in the Potteries to make a living as a druggist. He was a mortgagee of the Burslem chapel; and payments under it were a significant burden to Hugh Bourne after the congregation failed. Charles married Ann Brownsword, but the relationship ended in the 1840s. He continued to support her and the family financially, but apparently migrated to Australia: Ann appeared in the 1851 Census as a married woman head of household supported by an annuity.²⁸ There was enough money to set his eldest son up as a druggist too, but not enough to protect him against failure.²⁹

The final figure is James Bourne. He took over the family farm and was a more entrepreneurial figure than his elder brother. Despite connexional discretion it is plain that he built a substantial printing business on the captive market of PM publications for two decades. He was, to judge from his loss of £6000 in an unwise pottery venture, a man with significant resources – although since the loss bankrupted him, they were clearly finite. He also, unlike Hugh, built a network of key alliances around Tunstall. These particularly involved Abraham and Hancock, but by the early 1840s, neither could help him. Abraham, while still a creditor, had departed and Hancock died in 1843, still owing the Connexion money. The blame for the Book-Room issues was heaped on James Bourne and the hapless John Hallam.³⁰ Bourne was stripped of his connexional offices, and although the farm tenancy passed to his son, the family's finances were ruined: the son – at one time a Poor Law Guardian – had to apply for parish relief himself in later life.³¹

²⁸ HO107/2169/45/14.

²⁹ HO107/2169/118/6 (druggist with apprentice and domestic servant); RG9/2211/36/15 (locomotive fireman); RG10/3184/51/41 (engine driver); RG11/2732/110/29 (colliery engine driver); then RG12/2179/131/20 (night foreman).

³⁰ The accounting of Hallam's liability appears in a small section entitled 'Various Regulations' dated 1847 and bound together with *Consolidated Minutes of the Primitive Methodist Connexion, 1849-1855*, London, 1855, consulted at the Wesley Centre, Oxford.

³¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 15th October 1885.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

We know nothing about the East Midlands figures who transformed the movement in the 1816-1819 period, and know a little more about Clowes only because of his Wedgwood associations. Clowes himself was never prosperous, yet it is hard to imagine that he might not have been had he chosen to apply himself to his family trade rather than his chosen church. His mother was the daughter of Aaron Wedgwood IV whose business failed following an unwise diversification into porcelain manufacture. Yet the family was not ruined; her brother Joseph would re-establish the family's fortunes and, in addition to giving William his start as a potter, left her a small annuity when he died in 1817.³² The pottery operated from property owned by a Wedgwood cousin (a hint about the rentier status of John Wedgwood's father: the family owned much of the prime land in the Potteries). Clowes, though, proved to be a talented but ill-disciplined employee, and his first marriage in 1800 was not a success. He twice left the marital home within the first few years, ending up in Hull, but spending his money faster than he was earning it; he returned home to undergo a religious conversion in 1805 that led eventually to a life as a travelling preacher, working only just enough to survive, and finally agreeing to accept funding from others to allow himself to be given up to the work full-time. Yet his skills as a potter could have earned him a comfortable living (he was able to earn more than double a labourer's weekly wage in three days); his family connections would have ensured him a similarly straightforward opportunity to set up in the business on his own account; and he might readily have done so when he abandoned his youthful excesses at the age of 25. His leadership of the Hull Circuit, and later the District, indicates that his people management skills were strong: as noted earlier, he by quiet persuasion and force of personality instituted procedures within a few months to cure problems at Hull that the Connexion as a whole later balked at for over two years when Hugh Bourne tried to implement them

³² Wedgwood, *History*, pp. 161-2.

nationally.³³ His activism not only would prove injurious to his own health and financial well-being (more so than his earlier dissipation); his wife's nervous state was destroyed by it too, and she returned to Tunstall around 1824, never again to live under the marital roof. She died in 1833, and Clowes remarried the following year.

By this date, Steele too was dead: he would have been a deed-poll member but for its delay to 1830. At that time, the inaugural list of these 12 most senior figures comprised eight businessmen or farmers, three itinerants, and an unknown character, Richard Odlin.³⁴ With the exception of Bourne and Clowes, further biographical detail is scant, whereas three names of the men who acceded to high office in their place around this time stand out: Thomas Bateman, the towering lay figure of the 1840-1890 period, and the itinerants John Flesher and John Petty. Bateman was a long-time ally, confidant and advisor of Bourne, who although he did not accept formal office until 1837 had been actively involved in the movement's counsels since the early 1820s; Flesher more than anyone else engineered the eclipse of the Bournes; Petty wrote the authorised version of events. Bateman and the two itinerants stood on opposite sides of a connexional debate that had been suppressed in the Bourne-Clowes era. He was, like Bourne, an old-fashioned countryman and Sabbatarian: he walked prodigious distances while his horses stood idle at the family farm. He was, already in the 1840s, not in accord with the changing attitudes towards professionalization, and the status and role of the preacher. Within five years of the enforced superannuation of Bourne, Conference debated the merits of a ministerial training college and was presented with draft rules for a school for preachers' children. The telling 1845 *PMM* article already cited occurred between these two events; the lay delegates agreed with

³³ Clowes, *Journals*, passim, but especially pp. 1-6, 19-21, and 87.

³⁴ Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 440: Itinerants are Clowes, William Garner and Sampson Turner; businessmen and farmers are Messrs Black, Bourne x 2, Bowen, Hancock, Sugden, Taylor and Waller. No person named Richard Odlin has been traced in other sources.

Bateman in voting down these developments but the agenda that promoted them reflected the itinerants' preparedness to think the unthinkable, and they succeeded in due course. The 'middle-class' (sic) boarding school opened in York in 1864, headed by John Petty, and he quickly added a seminary for aspiring preachers.³⁵ When the decision was finally taken, the tone of the debate was telling: one delegate argued that if the Prims did not provide preachers' sons, and those of their most prosperous followers, with intellectual as well as religious education opportunities, the parents would send them elsewhere, both educationally and denominationally.³⁶ William Antliff, a rising star of the connexion and the man described by Kendall as 'the best known and most influential figure of the Middle Period' was making a prescient point: his son would be ordained a Congregational minister, while a subsequent President of Conference was father to an Anglican clergyman.³⁷

Before then though, the 1845 Conference decided that only itinerants with a minimum of 18 years' service, 12 of which were as Circuit Superintendent, were eligible to be nominated to Conference. The result was a gerontocracy. So while William Antliff attended his first Conference aged 24 in 1838, his brother Samuel began his itinerancy at an equally youthful age but was 35 when he reached Conference – and he was one of the high flyers. Others sometimes waited thirty years, until some relaxation of the rules was undertaken.³⁸ The rules for laymen were apparently more generous: they required only to have served for a decade in some office. Yet the process by which they were selected – first at circuit level to occupy District offices, and then selected by District committees to represent them at Conference – meant that established figures blocked younger laymen's

³⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 520ff; the quoted words come from p. 522.

³⁶ 1860 PM Conference minutes, cited in Lysons, *A Little Primitive*, p. 62.

³⁷ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 543; Benjamin Nightingale, *Lancashire Nonconformity*, vol I, Manchester, 1891, p. 43); Lister's son's calling: Probate Calendar 1880, where he was his father's co-executor.

³⁸ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, pp. 368-376: gerontocracy debated at length here, including the facts about the Antliffs, and Flesher's hostility to the 1845 decision.

paths. Seniority was not everything, but the lack of it was disbarment. The generation born around the opening decade of the century thus succeeded to the leadership of the movement created by Steele, Bourne and Clowes, but then corralled power to themselves at the expense of those born later. That underlines the representative importance of the three men to be considered: all were born before 1810. They managed to accede to high office quickly, in a way denied to slightly younger men. Their good fortune is then underlined by noting the fates of two men born shortly thereafter.

THOMAS BATEMAN

Thomas Bateman was born in October 1799, and became a local preacher around 1821, occupied connexional office for about half a century from 1837 (having hitherto declined), and died in 1897. Two telling clues as to his status can be gleaned from William Clowes' Journal. When Englesea Brook chapel was reopened in 1832 following the insertion of a gallery, Clowes, although a Hull District man, preached at three of the services held to mark the occasion, and Bateman preached the fourth.³⁹ It probably helped that his wife-to-be was named Salmon, a member of one of the founding families, and was Ann Bourne's sister-in-law to-be.⁴⁰ Then, Clowes usually refers to itinerants as 'Brother' and laymen with their full name: but he referred here to 'Mr Bateman', the form of address he reserved for people he regarded as his social superiors.⁴¹

³⁹ Clowes, *Journals*, p. 322.

⁴⁰ The Englesea Brook network is an unexplored area deserving of a full-scale prosopographical study.

⁴¹ Clowes, *Journals*: in the first 100 pages of the work, Clowes uses the title in relation to only twelve people: four employers, three property-owners, two influential preachers, John Wesley, and Messrs Smith and Steele of Tunstall. Respected activists are accorded 'Brother' (e.g., 'Brother Nixon'); others are identified either by initials (e.g., 'Mr A. S.') or full name (e.g., 'Daniel Shubotham').

Bateman's relatively late arrival in national office arose, according to the denominational account, from his natural reticence,⁴² or perhaps, because he was a late developer:

Neither physically nor mentally was he considered strong in childhood, but vast possibilities slumbered in his seemingly dull intellect and frail physique.⁴³

Yet Thomas was appointed as executor by two aunts and an uncle in his twenties. The wills that exposed this also record that Thomas received one-quarter of the estate of the uncle, a yeoman farmer who died without issue in 1829; plus 19 guineas from each of the aunts in 1830 and 1832. When his father died the following year, he obtained a one-third share of the estate, plus the heritable lease of the family's 104 acre farm. That was the most valuable component of his inheritances, but the cash element amounted to over £200, then more than five years' salary for a married itinerant preacher with the Connexion.⁴⁴

Thomas prospered: he made a short-term advance of £271 in the 1850s to the parish of Wrenbury to improve the value of the living,⁴⁵ and later a long-term loan of £1000 for the construction of Wedgwood Memorial Chapel in Crewe, at a rate of 4% pa. His estate was proved at £2141, but it ignored the value of the heritable tenancy, and excluded pre-mortem gifts: the chapel loan note formed part of the estate of his third-born son, John Bateman, at the time of his death in 1911.⁴⁶ Presumably, there were similar lifetime gifts to his eldest son to set him up in Canada, and to his preacher son too. Bateman, in short, was a rather prosperous farmer. He might have advanced himself to freeholder – the chapel loan alone would have secured him a sizeable farm locally – but instead chose to remain a heritable tenant.

⁴² Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 9.

⁴³ Ritson, *Romance*, p. 180.

⁴⁴ CRO: Bateman will references are Thomas, WS1829; Martha, WS1830; Jane, WS1832; and John, WS 1833 also Bateman family papers, bundle D1623.

⁴⁵ CRO: Wrenbury Parish Vestry minute book, D172/11.

⁴⁶ CRO: Will of Bateman, John, WR52, p 280. The loan note alone exceeded John's share of his father's estate.

No doubt Ritson's observation that he had a genius for hard work was true, but this was not the whole story. As a teenager, he was a Sunday School teacher in the Anglican Church, and his roles as executor in his twenties already noted. He became parish surveyor for the Poor Law Commissioners in his thirties and was later Deputy Chairman; was census enumerator for his township; and co-founded what would eventually become the dominant farmers' co-operative in North-West England. Ritson claims that he stepped down because of competing demands on his time, although it would in due course make others rich. The time pressures are not in doubt, but he was still a Board Member of the organisation in his sixties.⁴⁷ His involvement in vestry affairs went beyond his poor law role too, although the family's claim that he was Wrenbury's vestry clerk for over sixty years is not borne out by the minute-book.⁴⁸ Thomas was clearly regarded as a shrewd and solid citizen: despite his religious preference, he both raised funds for, and made investment decisions on behalf of, the parish vestry first in a local canal company and then by aggregating funds to purchase a farm by way of improving the income stream (this the occasion of the £271 loan). It secured poor law income as well as doubling the incumbent's stipend to £35 pa (which, it will be noted, was less than the interest on his PM chapel loan). His achievements led to the award, in 1864, of a valuable memento for his services over the preceding decades.⁴⁹

The claim that he was a late developer is perhaps an attempt to account for Bateman's late accession to office in the Connexion, which followed the death of his long-time friend and Burland circuit co-founder, George Taylor. His career progression thereafter was rapid

⁴⁷ Ritson, *Romance*, pp. 181-2; but see Bateman family papers, CRO D1623, indicating that Bateman was a member of its management board in the 1860s. The Cheshire and Shropshire Farmers' cooperative would eventually spin off Boughey Distribution Ltd, and become North West Farmers Ltd. The Bougheys (Boffeys) farmed in Chorley township.

⁴⁸ Claim made in death announcement, *Liverpool Mercury*, 4th Feb 1897.

⁴⁹ CRO, P172, Wrenbury Vestry minutes; *Nantwich Guardian*, 22nd October 1864; other material Kendall, *Origin*, *passim*.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

and sustained: as Deed Poll member, President (twice), member of various committees (especially finance-related) and being one of the Connexional auditors between 1849-58, then again 1862-84, a total of 31 years, ending in his 85th year.⁵⁰ Bateman's involvement in connexional affairs dates from much earlier, though. He had consistently been involved in the inner counsels of the Connexion from 1821 onwards, taking part in the decision to split Tunstall circuit, being consulted over the fate of Chester branch (later Circuit) and being requested to attend the important Ramsor meeting in 1824 at which the looming problems of over-expansion were debated among the Tunstall leadership.⁵¹ Clearly, therefore, whether in connexional or other spheres, Thomas was not afraid of responsibility, and others were keen to award him it. Bateman himself would claim that his refusal to accept formal office was because he felt no special call to it, but that seems unlikely. He was keen to be involved in the decision-making, but not on formal recognition of the fact. Kendall, perhaps unpersuaded by Bateman's explanation, sought to suggest that his early refusal of formal office in the connexion was all of a piece with the refusal to accept the chairmanship of the Poor Law Union (he insisted on retaining only the deputy's role), but the two are qualitatively different. As Deputy, Bateman had the power but not the public profile; as informal guru to Bourne and others he lacked the sort of authority that a similar discreet Connexional role such as member of the book-room committee would have afforded. Five individually innocent facts together suggest a more prosaic reason. First, Thomas preferred Methodist to Anglican worship even while a Sunday-School teacher for the latter, but he declined to become a Wesleyan class-member. Second, although eventually won over by Wedgwood's preaching he initially refused to go to listen to him at Bulkeley on Easter Sunday 1819: according to Kendall he harboured 'a little prejudice' that was not overcome until he had attended two further events over the

⁵⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 400.

⁵¹ For six specific instances of 1820s involvement, see Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 439, 491, 511 and 512; and ii, pp. 8-9 and 416.

following five weeks. Wedgwood was preaching once or twice a day in the area, and Bateman was subject to repeated and insistent persuasion by others before he relented. Third, although he rapidly became PM class leader and local preacher, he initially refused to be identified on preaching-plans. Fourth, despite administering baptism to others as a PM preacher, he preferred to baptise each of his own children, starting in 1834 and continuing into the late 1840s, at the parish church. It might be argued that Bateman was simply following a tradition of being a Church Methodist here; if so one might reasonably then expect him to have regularly taken Anglican Communion, but Bateman was, by Kendall's account, not a communicant. The alternative explanation, of the legal security of Anglican baptism, applies only to William, his first-born, as all later children fell under civil registration provisions. Finally, his marriage to Ann Salmon was notified in the personal notices columns of not one but two regional newspapers. No other contemporary marriage in either family appeared in the press.⁵² Although hardly conclusive, these are together strongly indicative that Thomas was sensitive about his public image and thus felt a lingering nervousness about being too closely associated with Dissent in the minds of others around him.

Unlike their father, both Thomas and his sisters were literate (Mary and Elizabeth signed as witnesses to the will of Martha Bateman, one of the relatives for whom he acted as executor). We can assume that the children were educated locally, and to a high standard for the progeny of a tenant farmer: he had mastered the arts of surveying, while his written skills are on display in his journals and the biography he penned on John Wedgwood. They are by some margin more literate – and readable – than Hugh Bourne's writings, although as discussed in the introduction they share the same preference for discretion

⁵² Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 511/2; Wrenbury Parish baptismal registers, microfilm, Nantwich Public Library, 1834 et seq.; marriage announcements *Manchester Times*, 29th June 1833, and *Liverpool Mercury*, 5th July 1833.

coupled with emphasising the humble and the heroic. His progress through his later years can be tracked via the census from 1841 onwards. The five non-family members then living under his roof, comprising domestic servants and agricultural labourers, fell to three in 1851, because the bulk (another 12) of his staff and their dependents, plus aged former employees and their spouses, lived in two adjacent dwellings. The farm was thus supporting his family (by then numbering nine) plus five agricultural labourers and a domestic servant plus dependants; yet Bateman did not maintain the widows of his former employees: they went on to parish relief. By 1861, only his younger children plus the domestic servant and a stable-boy lived under Thomas Bateman's roof: his other six agricultural employees lived separately. In 1871, Bateman was already retired, and absent visiting his itinerant son Thomas (junior) in Chester, in a home complete with domestic servant; back at Chorley Green, the household had swelled to include three domestic servants. His third son, John, had taken over the farm and is shown as the farmer in the 1881-1901 censuses, but he was recorded at death as a farmer at Gorsty Hill (close to Englesea Brook), having passed the Chorley Green farm on to his son, Albert.⁵³ The eldest son, William, disappeared between the 1841 and 1851 censuses, but is named as a living beneficiary and co-executor in Bateman's will. He is believed to be the same William Bateman, a farmer and Primitive Methodist born in England, listed as living in Grey, Huron County, Ontario in the 1881 Canadian Census.⁵⁴

In summary therefore, Thomas Bateman was a quietly prosperous farmer whose initial hesitancy to be too publicly identified with the Primitive Methodists was slowly overcome. He was recognised from a young age as a man of talent and good judgement, by people

⁵³ Census data: 1841, HO107/118/8, page 6; 1851, HO107/2170/294/9 (the pauper entries are 294/8); 1861, RG9/2623/73/18; 1871 (farm) RG10/3716/157/2, (Thomas) RG10/3731/66/28; 1881, RG11/3551/63/17; 1891, RG12/2858/136/10; and 1901, RG13/3364/109/9.

⁵⁴ Census transcription: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1881/001049-100.01-e.php>, or search "Bateman-William-47-England-Ontario".

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

inside and beyond his chosen church. In his later years, he was able to straddle a wide range of roles. The parish made a formal presentation in 1864 to reflect his efforts on behalf of the vestry; and an event to mark the 50th anniversary of his becoming a member of the Primitive Methodist Connexion attracted several hundred guests. In a public speech delivered at the latter he said:

Where was the policeman who could drive them from preaching Christ: they would as soon go to prison with [Jesus] as to breakfast without him. He had never been to prison himself, but he had been threatened with it.⁵⁵

Here the by now elderly farmer, a pillar of the local community, financially secure, with his eldest son set up as a farmer in Canada, the second a Reverend minister in his church, and the third running the farm, reminisces about past hardships that he never encountered, and that few others suffered anyway. The discourse held sway.

Thomas's life was financially more fruitful than Bourne's, yet it had many of the same ingredients: Anglican farming origins; adequate rather than exceptional educational exposure; early religious leanings to Wesleyanism; the talent to make money beyond the family farm; the opportunity to do so circumscribed by religious activity; and a workaholic approach to life. Both also shared a taste for wrapping themselves in humble garb – much humbler than their circumstances warranted. But where Bourne was confrontational and anxious to cement his place in connexional history, Bateman was collaborative, and quietly content to let the record speak for him. It does, if we listen hard enough.

JOHN FLESHER

The Flesher surname is relatively unusual, and highly localised, with over 80% of pre-1850 baptisms occurring in Yorkshire. This bedevilled the task of tracing John Flesher's

⁵⁵ Reproduced as small pamphlet in Bateman family papers, CRO D1623.

origins, because he was baptised in Otley in 1801, and the family later lived at Silsden. It was possible, though, to infer something of his origins from events later in his life, and these findings were confirmed by uncovering a newspaper article written about him some years after his death.⁵⁶ John's father was both grocer and schoolmaster in Silsden, but neither the father nor the National schoolmaster could keep up with his education, and he was sent to lodge with a sister, who had married a farmer, in order to receive further schooling. He had preached his trial sermon for the Wesleyans by the age of 15, and soon afterwards a local wool dealer returned from a buying trip into Lincolnshire with news of the new Methodist sect there. Flesher was pressed to invite them; he did, and within 15 months had gathered 626 members for the Prims. They met in the family's barn. The youthful Flesher took up a teaching job in Leeds but maintained his preaching involvement, becoming a remunerated PM itinerant in 1822. He married in 1823, and was appointed superintendent of a circuit by the late 1820s. By the 1830s he was regarded as Hull's (and, with Clowes off the plan since 1827 as a supernumerary, the Connexion's) best preacher, and given its toughest assignments. Flesher is the only itinerant in the Connexion dignified, like Bateman, with the 'Mr' designation by Clowes,⁵⁷ and that hint is confirmed by the telling wording in the deeds of Allendale Chapel, 1829. He is the first-named trustee, and the lawyerly description of him is unlikely to have been carelessly granted: 'John Flesher, gentleman, and minister of the gospel in the Primitive Methodist Connexion'.⁵⁸ As with Wedgwood, none of this was hidden from public view; yet the connexional accounts say almost nothing of his economic circumstances. Indeed Ritson

⁵⁶ *Leeds Mercury*, 12th November 1887; the story differs interestingly from that in Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 116ff.

⁵⁷ Clowes, *Journals*, p. 319.

⁵⁸ William Patterson, *Primitive Methodism: A Record of the Rise and Progress of the Circuits in the Old Sunderland District*, London, 1909, p. 178.

spends almost four pages without mentioning any of the foregoing: instead he notes that Flesher fought a case in chancery so as *not* to inherit the sum of £10,000.⁵⁹

Flesher was named as Bourne's successor before he would even have qualified as a Conference delegate under the 1845 rules; and his period in office ended in ill-health in 1852, although it is unclear how much of that was due to the growing controversy over his edition of the Hymn-Book. He lived for a further 22 years, retiring first to Scarborough, before moving to Easingwold then Harrogate before finally settling at Forest Moor House, near Knaresborough.⁶⁰ He died in 1874 and left estate valued at about £8500, a level that places him in the top 2% by wealth of those dying in England in the closing four decades of the century. He did not earn that from his itinerancy, nor by way of the rejected windfall.⁶¹ There were five identifiable children of the marriage to Jane Cawood in 1823:⁶² William Kingston in 1825; Mary Alice in 1828; Jane Elizabeth in 1831; John (junior) in 1833, and Sanderson, born 1841. Jane died aged 14 in London, as did Sanderson in his mid-20s, while all three surviving children migrated to Canada. William emigrated shortly after marrying, aged 22, taking 14-year old John with him; Mary married an itinerant, John Garner (son of one of three Garner brothers, all important itinerants in the early connexion), who was sent across the Atlantic to minister.⁶³ Interestingly, the newspaper article (based on a posthumous biography of which no copy has been discovered) maintains the discourse of hardship: it states that he and his wife 'endured...cheerfully the poverty and suffering involved in the first twenty years of his

⁵⁹ Ritson, *Romance*, p. 235ff.

⁶⁰ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p 258, provides an image of his final home.

⁶¹ The National Probate Calendar for 1874 lists his effects at a figure of (over £8000 and) under £9000; his executor was his son, William Kingston Flesher. He is recorded as "gentleman", with no reference to his status as a reverend minister.

⁶² Marriage at St Peter's, Leeds, 31st August 1823: Yorkshire Archives Service, Wakefield; Parish Records: RDP68/4/15. The two deaths were hinted at by the disappearance of both from successive censuses, and confirmed by on-line searches of databases.

⁶³ Hopper, J. A., *Old-Time Primitive Methodism in Canada*, Toronto, 1904, p. 70.

ministry.' Yet during this claimed period of poverty, John (junior) had been a boarding-school pupil in Ramsgate – probably at what became the Chatham House School – and it would be fairly unusual for a family to send the middle son, but not the others. Flesher did not fund that from his PM earnings, but clearly he did not need to. Both surviving sons made a material success of their lives in Canada: the town of Flesherton was named in William's honour, and John (junior) was a member of the provincial parliament. Both acquired a portfolio of businesses.⁶⁴ One interesting sidelight on the father's social position is inferred from the baptisms of his first four children, as follows: William under Anglican rites at Great Driffield in 1825; Jane Elizabeth at Hull's Mill Street PM chapel in 1831, and John (junior) at Great Driffield in January 1834 under Anglican rites. However Mary and Jane, then aged five and two, were also given Anglican baptism in the same 1834 ceremony: the security of establishment clearly meant much even to a man who devoted his life to the workaholic promotion of his chosen church.⁶⁵ John Flesher was succeeded in the office of Editor by John Petty, and like him, his arrival was necessitated by the ill-health of the incumbent.

JOHN PETTY

Petty brought the same workaholic approach as his predecessors but lived to fill another office thereafter, when he became governor of Elmfield College, the boarding school cum seminary for aspiring itinerants in York first debated by Conference 15 years earlier. He contributed both organisationally and theologically to the work, and some of his lectures became set texts. He was, like all of the early figures in the connexion, self-taught to a

⁶⁴ Hubbert, M. Y., *Split Rail Country: A History of Artemesia Township, Owen Sound, Ontario*, 1986, p. 121.

⁶⁵ Children's baptisms were obtained from searches via www.familysearch.org; the Anglican ones were sourced from local microfilm copies, the Hull PM baptism from microfilms of the Registrar-General's archive set, RG4/3713.

significant degree; but his circumstances were perhaps less lowly than a cursory reading would suggest. Born in 1807, he was one of ten children of a tailor, Micah Petty, who in turn was the son of a weaver. Yet the wider Petty family, originally spelled Petyt, flow from three rich gentry-folk of the seventeenth century, and John's line traces back to the second son of a prosperous yeoman of Langbar near Ilkley. Distant cousins were Anglican rectors in Lancashire, and notable Wesleyan supporters and business-people around Leeds. Thus when Kendall comments that Micah encouraged his son's education and early desire to enter Nonconformist ministry, it is hardly likely that the tailor did so based on any residue of a journeyman's wage after meeting the costs of his sizeable family. As was often the case for Dissenters, education was only available informally; it was provided in this case by a committed Baptist who divided his time between his artisan calling and part-time teaching. Yet the 'class' comprised only four people: the teacher's son, John Petty, and the two children of the squire; and John's later accomplishments confirm the teacher's ability.⁶⁶ More feasibly, Micah could afford the luxury of education for John in the years after the age of eight because he ran his own business.

John's rise through the ranks of PM itinerants was meteoric: appointed at 18, he was named as superintendent of the Tunstall circuit before the age of 22, and he did not disappoint his backers. He had earned it by his remarkable diligence and achievements in South Wales when given an apparently impossible task of recovering a ruined circuit; and he later went on to other similar assignments before gravitating to connexion-wide responsibilities. As with William Antliff and John Flesher, Petty reached Conference while still a young man, becoming connexional Editor in his forties; by then this was the age at which even the best itinerants might hope to appear at their first Conference.

⁶⁶ See <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~petyt/default.htm>: family history web-site of Angela Petyt (consulted February 2010, confirmed operative 4th March 2012); also Kendall, *Origin*, ii, pp. 120-3.

Despite his workload, Petty survived to take over Elmfield school; he died at the age of 60.⁶⁷ There is no trace of a will for either him or his widow, which suggests that he was not in the same bracket financially as Flesher. Yet his early promise and education speak of a modestly prosperous family background. He was hardly proletarian in origin, but came from that large hinterland, the educated Dissenters, who would form so much of the middle class of Victorian England once emancipated both religiously and politically. His life is a testament not only to his church of choice but also his family's milieu; his death was doubtless accelerated by overwork, although his forecast, consistent with the heroic self-image, of dying before reaching 33 was out by 27 years.⁶⁸

The progress of other notable figures such as William Antliff shows that these three men were representative of the precocious talent that the Prims could call upon, and the rapid progress they were thereby enabled to achieve. Two other men who, thanks to the accident of timing, were too late to benefit this way were important laymen known to Bateman; indeed it was their links to him that brought them to notice.

ROBERT MAYER

Robert Mayer was already a local preacher by the age of 17; but he was born in 1826 and despite his status within the District he never secured national prominence before his early death aged 59. He was the youngest of the men individually featured here, being twenty-five years Bateman's junior but thanks to Thomas's remarkable longevity they were contemporaries for about three decades, and weighty individuals in the Tunstall District.

⁶⁷ *Hull Packet & East Riding Times*, 1st May 1868; *Manchester Times*, 2nd May 1868.

⁶⁸ Petty expected to die at that age from the rigours of the work: James Macpherson, *The Life and Labour of the Reverend John Petty, Late Minister of the Primitive Methodist Connexion...*, London, 1870, p. 335; this cited with the exact quotation in Garrett, 'PM in Shropshire', p. 127.

He was one of the earliest PM figures to make a mark in politics, although in his case it was in local politics only, a role he combined with active and life-long involvement in the affairs of his church. Kendall's *History* made a single passing reference to him, as one of the figures whose status was intended to emphasise that of the more famous Thomas Bateman:

We do not forget such prominent Tunstall District men as Thomas Wood, the Brownhills, R. Mayer, the first Primitive Methodist Mayor of Newcastle-under-Lyme (sic), and others already mentioned.⁶⁹

But for this and three other clues, Robert's contemporary status would be invisible to us now. First, Bateman officiated at the baptism of Mayer's daughter Alice, in 1857; it was the only one he performed there over a total of over three decades.⁷⁰ Second the guest list at Bateman's golden wedding celebration included local gentry and nobility but Robert, then Tory Mayor of Newcastle-under-Lyme, was the guest of honour. Finally, he appears as only one of two 'Esquires' among the ten names to have donated enough to the building of the Bateman Memorial Chapel to warrant a commemorative plaque, and it occupies pride of place on the front of the surviving shelter in the graveyard (the chapel itself having been demolished around 1970). Robert was the third son and fourth child of Thomas and Sarah Mayer, born in 1826.⁷¹ Thomas died in 1842, and curiously, although he was not the freeholder of the property where he was living in Fletcher Street, Newcastle, aged 61, he was recorded as eligible to vote in the poor rate assessment book for the borough; in addition although described as a labourer as baptismal father, both he and his wife were literate, a somewhat unusual conjunction which together hint at a higher prosperity than the employment designation would suggest. Mayer's obituary is broadly confirmatory of this,

⁶⁹ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 9. The three Brownhill brothers all became Mayors of Walsall. Their politics were Liberal, and two were keen supporters of Temperance (*Birmingham Daily Post*, four articles on Walsall by-election, 5th-13th August 1891); they managed the family steel foundry business. Thomas Wood, and his nephew John Wood were connexional worthies (Kendall, *Origin*, i, p. 73); they owned a tannery business in Nantwich and left substantial sums on their deaths.

⁷⁰ Baptism 24th May 1857, in Higherland Baptisms Register, 1846 onwards, held as unindexed microfilm at Newcastle-under-Lyme Public Library, (originals catalogued as 'Bundle Z', but not for issue.)

⁷¹ Microfilm copy of St Giles Church registers, location as above.

although the claim that his parents had been improvident is commonly made about non-PM parents of connexional figures.⁷²

Robert had already left the family home prior to his father's death, and was living under his employer's roof, apprenticed as a butcher to James Champ. The surname was unknown in North Staffordshire until the arrival of John Champ, described at the time as a Sergeant of Dragoons, and at least four children of his marriage to Elizabeth survived to adulthood: Robert married Elizabeth junior, whose siblings James, Edward and Sarah can be traced.⁷³

Robert appears to have been that Victorian archetype, the self-made man; but self-reliance was easier with the benefit of a kinship or friendship network. The imagined solo capitalist hero was often a beneficiary of ready access to work, skills training, advice, guidance, influential acquaintances, soft loans and preferential awarding of business that removed most of the entrepreneurial risk – the life-history of Joseph Wedgwood, discussed earlier in the context of its impact on William Clowes' fortunes, is a clear instance of it. This might well have been the case here: the father, Thomas, was clearly a more substantial figure than the bare description 'labourer' allows, and there were two influential and wealthy families of Mayers in Newcastle-under-Lyme in the early 1800s; the source of their prosperity was animal-related (veterinary surgeons and tanners); and one of the tanner's sons was a butcher. So perhaps Thomas was related to the wealthy Mayers, but did not share their head for business whereas his son did. It proved impossible to tie down any such link, but the notion that Robert got a flying start to his business career from some

⁷² *PMM*, 1886, p. 376.

⁷³ Robert provides the link between James and Elizabeth (junior); poor-rate assessment books show the latter living with her mother; parish records show the mother as witness to her marriage to Robert; poor-rate entries in the 1840s place her next-door to Sarah, by now Stafford, in Higherland. Sources: microfilm, Newcastle-under-Lyme Public Library. Then, Eliza Mayer, Edward's daughter (1841 Census – HO107/1009/4, ED7/22/36), is shown in the 1851 census as niece of Sarah Stafford: HO107/2001/331/12. Elizabeth (senior) was lodging as mother-in-law with Robert and Elizabeth (junior) at the time of the 1861 census: RG9/1917/86/13.

family source is rather less improbable than that a man of twenty 'with but a small capital in money', and with an illiterate wife and child, would within three years have been able to branch out to self-employment.⁷⁴

By age 23, he had done just that, renting a house, shop and slaughter-house on Pool Street. Eight years later, he owned two houses on Higherland, but rented a much grander one, based on its higher poor rate assessment. By 1860, not yet 35, his properties numbered eight; by 1870, he owned the freehold of a home on prestigious Church Street, his son Frederick lived 'over the shop' on the equally prestigious King Street, and Robert's portfolio exceeded twenty properties. By 1882, the last revaluation before his death, he had added more properties in Church Street and his son was now the freeholder of the King Street property, although Robert was still shown as the business owner in the trade directory.⁷⁵ Robert's starting funding came from somewhere, and it was not the Champs: Elizabeth (junior) was an illiterate seamstress at marriage, and there is no record of any member of the Champ family owning property in Newcastle-under-Lyme in the period 1840 to 1882. The source may never be known, but the idea that he would have been a good risk aged 23, able to attract funding on a commercial basis, can be dismissed as spectacularly improbable; and there was enough of it to embark upon a butchery business that more or less immediately began to make him rich. His will when proved in 1885 amounted to only £530. This, though, is sufficient to place him above the 91st percentile by moveable wealth of those dying in England; given his significant property portfolio, it is likely to understate his assets considerably.

⁷⁴ *PMM*, 1886, p. 376.

⁷⁵ Poor rate entries as previously cited; trade directory was Kelly's *Post Office Directory of Staffordshire*, 1884, London.

Robert and his eldest son, Frederick, were PM preachers at Higherland, but examination of the baptismal register indicates that in later years the son officiated more often than the father. By then, no doubt, Robert had his hands full with his local politics and his District roles. His local stature and financial position spilled over a generation too: one daughter married a young PM itinerant, and Frederick married Julia Anna Brassington, the daughter of a Congleton baker and retailer, who was a local official in the town's Primitive Methodist chapel. Julia's mother was also a well-known evangelist who, in widowhood, remarried the Tunstall circuit superintendent.

SAMUEL HEATH

Bateman's provision of funding for a chapel in Crewe has an echo in the guest-list for his golden wedding event. It included William McNeill and Samuel Heath, both prominent PM and Liberal figures in Victorian Crewe. There is remarkably little published material about the connexion there, even though it was the most numerous of the dissenting movements in the town. The youthful McNeill arrived only in 1853, and his heydays followed the core period of this research, but he is a figure of interest: William Chaloner, who wrote a local history of the town's development, described him as a 'Scottish travelling draper' who settled there and set up in business, becoming involved in both the local circuit's affairs and local politics. A generation younger than Heath, he was several times mayor, and chaired the education committee from its founding to his death in 1917.⁷⁶ He was also rather prosperous: his effects were probated at £5638 in 1917, which placed him firmly in the top 5% by personal worth of those dying around that time.

⁷⁶ Chaloner, *Crewe*, p. 152.

Rather more is known about Samuel Heath, thanks in no small part to a work commissioned by a Director of Barclays Bank, William Powell Heath. He secured the services of Canon John Beddow, the Rector of Crewe prior to World War II, to research his family history. It resulted in an error-strewn booklet called *Heathfolk – the Story of a Cheshire Family*, and two generations later, another family member updated, expanded and corrected much of it.⁷⁷ Powell Heath was Samuel Heath's grandson, and his elder brother was Town Clerk of Manchester. His father, Thomas Henry Heath (son of Samuel), had been a prosperous businessman, local politician and PM activist in the town too. The family's account follows the line that Samuel's rise to wealth and prominence was another example of the Victorian self-made man. Based on the earlier work, Chaloner could write that Heath's origins were working-class, and on the face of it, that seems merited: Samuel was an illiterate labourer at the time of his first child's baptism, a result of what Thomas Bateman would describe as a 'fearful lack of suitable training in early life...which he now bitterly regrets'.⁷⁸

Yet the connexional preference for claiming humble beginnings – especially if associated with improvident parents – suggests caution is required. Heath had been a local preacher for 13 years by the time he moved to Crewe, and he was appointed parish surveyor before the inheritance that was the basis of his later wealth. It was no unexpected windfall; he was a young man with expectations; his father knew of them when he denied him the early schooling that might have provided that 'suitable training'; and what he learned in the world of work and commerce stood him in good stead.⁷⁹ It was the beginning of a political

⁷⁷ Heath W. G., *Heathfolk Revisited: The History of a Cheshire Family*, privately published and deposited with the Crewe public library, 1999, but also now available as a net publication: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~wgheath/>.

⁷⁸ Chaloner, *Crewe*, pp. 108/9; Heath attracted no *PMM* obituary, despite his considerable financial and practical contribution. The quotation originates from Thomas Bateman's journal of 1866, reproduced in the magazine (1886, p 227), the only reference uncovered in any PM writings.

⁷⁹ Chaloner, *Crewe*, pp. 33/4.

association with the new town that would last for the rest of his life, and he marked the transition in 1850, when he self-described as a 'gentleman'. Over the next three decades, Samuel gave away large amounts of his wealth, and sold land at well below market prices, in order to promote the town. He could still afford to send two sons to Elmfield, the PM boarding-school school at York; donated (with a cousin) the land to build the Wedgwood Chapel in the street named after them, Bateman having lent the money for its construction; and paid the entire cost of the Heath Memorial Chapel nearby. Bateman commented that he was instrumental in providing further unspecified loans to other chapels in the circuit, and family sources assess the net value of his will at over £50,000.⁸⁰ The money element was a minor proportion of his assets, amounting to only about £850, but that sufficed to place Samuel around the 92nd percentile of those dying around that time. It goes without saying that he was enriched by the railway boom, but it is equally clear that he had significant starting advantages, despite Bateman's description of him as a 'workman'.

Heath and Mayer were both successful businessmen who had no qualms about combining private self-enrichment, public commitment to politics, and personal commitment to their chosen church. The source of Samuel's start in life is clearer than Robert's; and his politics were perhaps more contested in thrusting Crewe than Robert's in the older-established market town of Newcastle, and that may be one of the reasons that his PM influence was more localised. Thomas Bateman was a player in the national arena, but he had arrived long before the onset of the gerontocracy that denied them the same chance; these two were not yet 20 (Mayer) and 30 (Heath) when the rules were rewritten, and both died young. Bateman not only reached high office before the new rules came into effect; he avoided politics, as well as confrontations with the established church and the land-

⁸⁰ Heath, *Heathfolk Revisited*: chapter 2 (unpaginated). Nearly all of his assets were in property in Crewe: for example he owned the coal-wharf that delivered much of the town's fuel, the rent of which paid his widow's annuity.



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This is the reason that the indexation approach, initially employed, was discarded in favour of one based on wealth percentiles as instanced already. It is known that about one person in eight left a will or estate requiring probate action between 1861 and 1941;⁸⁵ if at least half died in minority, probate was applied to not more than one in four adults; and given that (despite the depression) standards of living rose over the 80-year period, it is likely that the proportion of testators with proved wills would have been lower than one in four prior to 1900. The fact of attracting probate thus places the testator among the top 25% of the population in socio-economic terms.⁸⁶ An average value of proved wills was then obtained from a random sample.⁸⁷ The results were interesting: the mean values of estates changed relatively little over the period 1863-1893 inclusive, but the value of the top 10% of them – the top 2.5% of the population by value – rose by 28%. This suggested that lower-value wills were not inflating much if at all over the period, and so a single table ranking wills by value, expressed as percentiles of the dying population, sufficed:

Table 9.1

Percentile	Probate value
81 st	51
86 th	187
91 st	434
96 th	1441
97 th	2380
98 th	3120
99 th	5127
100 th	10205

⁸⁵ Many wills required no probate action, because their value was too low; and for people with no fixed property, informal disposals meant that most did not feature in official records. Of the 50 million or so people who died between 1861 and 1941, only 6 million resulted in an entry in the probate calendar.

⁸⁶ This is a slight over-simplification: persons leaving wills worth under £20 were not necessarily better-off than those who did not appear on probate lists; but these account for only 0.3% of the sample.

⁸⁷ By randomly selecting a surname, Taylor, chosen from among the names featured in the PM sample sets, and listing all those whose wills were proved in the randomly-selected third year in each of the closing four decades of the century. This produced a list of 1000 persons whose wills were proved in 1863-1873-1884-1893 (all 1883 deaths of persons with surnames beginning T were proved in 1884 instead).

The method here was then applied to any individuals for whom probate could be traced. That excluded substantially all those persons dying before 1861 and any cases where the level of biographical data did not permit unambiguous tracing.⁸⁸

THE LAY OFFICIALS

The first sample group comprised those laypeople who both signed the returns to the 1851 Religious Census and added an employment or status description. This is potentially the least reliable sample, because the findings are determined by who decided to sign the returns, whether they chose to self-describe, and whether they over- or under-reported their status. A genuinely national sample was considered but rejected as impracticable (about half of the counties are yet to be transcribed), and so four English counties (Derbyshire, East Riding, Lincolnshire, and Norfolk) with significant PM presence – excluding the troublesome instance of Shropshire – generated a list of over 500 lay signatories. More than three-quarters of them (77%) were either local preachers or senior figures such as stewards, trustees, managers and similar designations. Some of these were also class-leaders, but the senior role was the one counted here; those who described themselves solely as class leaders accounted for another 9%, while exhorters and Sunday school teachers were entirely absent. The remaining 14% were unspecified or designated with no official position, such as ‘occupier’. Those who chose to add an employment description were spread across all three groups, but the measurable sample (which amounted to only 58 names, or 11% of signatories) was skewed towards the more senior local officials. Fully 55% of the self-describers followed non-manual occupations, mainly being small businessmen and farmers. Inspection suggests that there was no sustained effort to overstate their socio-economic station. In Norfolk alone, three small businessmen self-

⁸⁸ A few attracted later probate, or had the probate renewed at a later date.

owning aristocracy around Nantwich. One notable aspect concerning Robert is that while his politics were not unique among PM dignitaries, they were perhaps surprising for a man whose chapel was increasingly that of the miners of Newcastle-under-Lyme. They received no mention in a recent local study of the Prims there.⁸¹ The reason, no doubt, is that his political allegiance was simply not an issue within the local circuit. Robert's and Samuel's origins were rather more humble than Thomas's, but their social advancement is unmistakeable, measured in their political progress and the upward mobility of their children.

THE NEED FOR BROADER EVALUATIVE DATA

The question raised by the foregoing, though, is whether all five men were important yet untypical. In order to address that, much larger samples of connexional officials were sought, in four categories. Then each identified individual was researched, using denominational accounts as signposts rather than data sources, via censuses or newspapers, in order to gauge their status while living (censuses in particular proved useful in distinguishing between the small businessman and the journeyman); and employment was translated to socio-economic status by means of Watts' 11-step ladder, again reduced for convenience to fewer tiers. Finally their worth in death was sought in probate calendars and other sources as available – although in this respect only the probate calendars proved fruitful.

The probate values raise two interpretive issues. First, they relate only to the value of movable property, not that contained in land and real property, or in a heritable farm

⁸¹ Skerritt, J., *A Credit to the Nebroad* [literal rendering of the local dialect for Neighbourhood], unpublished M Phil dissertation, Keele, 2000.

tenancy. For many tenant farmers, this was the most valuable thing they passed on to the next generation; for Wedgwood's widow, Robert Mayer and Samuel Heath, their real property, not their financial assets, properly describe their socio-economic status. Second, though, translating these Victorian monetary sums to modern values is a process fraught with difficulty: it is beguilingly complicated, and the subject of frequent and wide debate.⁸² When one considers the range of answers available, that is hardly surprising: the most generous method (share of GDP) produces answers 46 times higher than the most niggardly (RPI) in 1830, and 16 times higher in 1880.⁸³ The method employed by the National Archives is RPI-based: it may properly reflect the change in cost of living for the standard that then ruled, but serves mainly to show that the present standard of living is much higher than then. It produces unhelpful results in translating relative standings: its formula would produce a modern labourer's wage amounting to £25 a week.⁸⁴ That suggests that an index based on wage movements might be a better option, but that too has limitations, particularly because the wage and wealth differentials in society are now very different. As a method it works reasonably well for expenditures, but it deals poorly with asset values: house prices represent a higher multiple of average earnings now than they did 150 years ago, and that tends to suggest that, for modest capital sums, the rather higher per capita GDP index should be used. Even that fails to encapsulate the value of significantly larger amounts: when Thomas Bateman could buy a farm for £1000, which was capable of supporting a farmer and his employees and family, and also an income stream for the landowner, it suggests that John Flesher's £8500 represented a very significant degree of economic clout.

⁸² See for example www.measuringworth.com/explaining_measures_of_worth.php. This is a layman's version of a paper published as article Laurence Officer and Samuel Wilkinson, 'Better Measurements of Worth', in *Challenge: The Magazine of Economic Affairs*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (July/August 2006), pp. 86-110.

⁸³ Another source cites 20% higher RPI equivalents; the differences are in how the RPI series are extended backwards in time. Laurence Officer and Samuel Williamson, "Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a UK Pound Amount, 1830 to Present,"; www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/

⁸⁴ According to the no-longer updated web page www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/

described by their trade, omitting to state that they were in business as employers of staff.⁸⁹ Had it been possible to trace enough of these people in probate registers, that might have allowed independent verification, but with so little data (about residence, date of death and surviving relatives who might be named as executors by way of confirmation) very few could be unambiguously identified; and this avenue had to be abandoned. Given the range of uncertainties, and assuming that the 55% figure is one with a high downside risk, the finding here must be regarded, without some further corroboration, as no more than indicative.

The second category, trustee lists, is more robust in that where such lists survive, the descriptions of the nominees' status is fairly reliable, and not influenced by any over- or under-reporting; but given the patchy survival and poor cataloguing of PM local records, trustee evidence has not featured much in existing histories. One writer devoted considerable effort to acquire data for one local area (many of the records in question have still not appeared in county archives), and concluded that the denomination's officials were made up of 31% farmers, 27% labourers, and 42% others, comprising craftsmen and tradesmen.⁹⁰ Ambler's rough split suited his purposes but limits the comparability with the present exercise, or indeed other evidence: for example, at least some of the 42% 'others' will have been shopkeepers. The intervening years have however seen a significant shift in data availability, for a variety of reasons: first, although trustee certification materials have often been lost, the trustee names and occupations also feature on property transactions, and as the records of solicitors acting for the other party have begun to be deposited in county archives, they have been cross-referenced in local record office indexes. The first

⁸⁹ Ede & Virgoe, *Norfolk*, entry nos. 772, 891 and 968. Brooke (772), self-described as a tailor was a master-tailor in the population census (HO 107/1822/285/34); Trollop (891) was an employer of three in his business, plus a resident domestic servant (HO107/1825/42/14); Walker (968) was an employer of five people (HO107/1827/25/43).

⁹⁰ Ambler, *Ranters*, 1989, p. 63; record status confirmed by LRO February 2012.

such example discovered was the 1854 trustee list for Cabourne (Lincolnshire) chapel mentioned in Chapter 8; it highlighted the unexpected character of trustees that might emerge.⁹¹ Second, the task of computerisation of archive indexes for productivity reasons has spurred a higher and more consistent tempo of indexing below collection level, and resulted in the expansion of information provided in those indexes. Third, local history and genealogy groups coming across stray records as they pursue ancestors have begun not to by-pass the materials of no immediate relevance but instead to net-publish their discoveries on a cooperative basis. In the last two years, there has been a growing tendency for genealogical services such as Genuki™ and Ancestry.com™ to add the private researches of individuals to their web-sites. Local and family history sources have contributed about a quarter of the trustee sets to a database that now exceeds 1000 names.⁹² Fourth – and most significantly – the growing interest in genealogy has produced much readier access to records. So, for example, when Mark Smith wanted to differentiate between a master-butcher and his employee in his 1984 study of Oldham and Saddleworth, he relied upon fallible gazetteers which he had to hunt through; today he could call up the census entries and read directly what they stated in succeeding census returns. The search tools currently on offer are rather rudimentary, and the prospects for further advances are considerable. Thus, while material previously inaccessible was able to be tapped here it is likely that future researchers will be enabled to conduct even larger and more thorough searches; if so it is likely that the findings here will prove to be provisional at best, and overtaken by larger samples still. Nonetheless, the range of sources, spanning 21 counties, is regarded as sufficiently wide and the number of individuals sufficiently large to think

⁹¹ LRO, Meth/C/Cabourne/D/1-4. All eight 1854 trustees were farmers or businessmen in this small village; although outside Ambler's study area, the sharp contrast with his findings is nonetheless surprising.

⁹² Unfortunately, the volatile character of some of the record sources means that, as at 28th March 2012, 161 trustees spanning 14 trusts for 11 chapels had vanished again: the trustee data hereafter relate only to the 861 trustee records for which citations remain live as at that date.

that the findings are likely to be more representative of the connexion's trustees as a whole than previous attempts to gauge them.

Two important patterns emerge from the data. First, the incidence of owners of small businesses, white-collar workers, farmers, professionals and the occasional member of the rentier class was almost as high among trustees as for signatories to the 1851 Census: 53% of trustees in the sample appointed following the execution of the Deed Poll in 1830 up to 1850 were in this category (although the sample size – 59 trustees – is again not large). Second though, the percentage dropped sharply to 35% in the two decades after 1850, and despite a steady rise thereafter, the figure was still below the pre-1850 level in the Edwardian era. It is thus striking that the same process of a dip in socio-economic status among PM adherents seen in longitudinal measures of three later circuits across England in the 1850s and 1860s is mirrored among its trustees at the same dates. This mutual corroboration strongly suggests that, before 1850, just over half of the movement's local officials (i.e., excluding exhorters and Sunday school teachers) were drawn from professional, business and white-collar people; but that this fell to around a third in the following two decades, echoing a similar fall in the recruitment profile reflected in baptismal registers.

Further analysis of the trustees by county type, and the geographic variability, suggests that other interesting insights are potentially available here. Without further and more intensive examination, the findings must be seen as indicative only, but it is notable that the skills split as between industrial and rural counties seen in baptismal evidence (Chapter 6) was cancelled out and indeed slightly reversed among trustees: the unskilled and semi-skilled fractions of trustees were higher in industrial as compared with rural counties (42% as compared with 33%). Some of the hesitancy concerns the over-representation of

Staffordshire and Leicestershire cases, which accounted for over 40% of industrial county names: their 261 trustees included 130 unskilled, depressed and semi-skilled workers, and half of the Leicestershire instances were framework knitters. Yet the lower-skilled results for the remaining industrial counties nonetheless exceeded the rural showing: it may thus be that the lingering adherence to rank suggested by the Leekfrith evidence had some effect in trustee appointments in rural congregations.⁹³ The Leicestershire result stands in sharp contrast with that for adjacent counties; more work is needed here too, in order to integrate the findings for worship density and socio-economic status of baptismal fathers: it may be, for example, that Leicestershire Primitive Methodism was uniquely appealing to the framework knitters: despite a much lower level of overall PM affiliation than in neighbouring Nottinghamshire, its showing among the knitters was much higher.

SENIOR CONNEXIONAL LAY FIGURES

The third lay group was the connexion's notables who featured in the connexion's centenary histories written in the Edwardian era.⁹⁴ Several hundred names appeared, but most of them were accompanied by so little biographical detail that there was no realistic prospect of tracing them. The sample was further reduced by the exclusion of people still alive in 1900, producing eventually a list of lay officials and connexional worthies numbering 126 individuals known to have died earlier, of whom 40 remained ambiguous or had so little data attached that no confident attribution could be made. These 86 comprised 38 businessmen, 17 farmers, 21 'gentlemen' who had made their money in one or other of these activities, and four professional or white-collar workers. These notables were thus a quite distinct population: not only were they almost exclusively drawn from

⁹³ See Chapter 8.

⁹⁴ Kendall, *Origin*; Ritson, *Romance*; and Patterson, *Sunderland*.

non-manual employments, but they occupied a distinctive group within them – the self-employed and professional classes. Nor were the missing cases necessarily poor and obscure; for example, one Manchester notable and long-time supporter of the mother church of Manchester PM was James Holden, who died in 1896. Only two men of that name had recorded deaths in the locality of Manchester in that year, one each in Salford and Rochdale; and both left wills. The Salford individual was ruled out after tracing in censuses, while the other James Holden had UK-only movable assets (and thus by implication had further assets overseas) that placed him in the top 1% of the population wealth-wise. Yet his connection was not sufficiently assured, and he was excluded from the 66 traced probates among the 86:

Table 9.2

Percentile	Connexional figures
76-80	2
81-85	11
86-90	6
91-95	15
96 th	8
97 th	6
98 th	4
99 th	7
100 th	7

A probate incidence of only just over 50% seems poor; yet most of the others were men who died before the commencement of civil registration. The post-1861 figure was 69%, roughly three times higher than among the population at large and as stated excludes instances such as Holden. One significant departure here though is that whereas other status measures have suggested a dip in the socio-economic status of PM members in the mid-Victorian era, there is no such evidence among the senior group: the averages for pre-1880 probates (which broadly reflect the status of people who had flourished two to four decades earlier) were only about half of the post-1880 figures at £3140 and £6080 respectively. It to some extent reflects the fact that the rich were getting richer faster.

This sample is shakily representative: Kendall was likely to identify poor heroic early figures and later prosperous ones; yet these are the names that appear with regularity in contemporary publications, and so are likely to reflect the character of the leadership to a fair degree. No doubt the 30 post-1861 deaths of untraced individuals – the Holden case notwithstanding – mainly comprise those of modest circumstances; yet 66 prosperous figures in a movement famed for poverty must be regarded as significant, and it tends to reinforce the message from the five highlighted cases earlier: this was a movement led by the discreetly prosperous and officered by a significant leavening of comfortably-off people drawn largely from the non-manual employment categories. That is not to deny that many others occupied rather more humble stations in life; but the conclusion that so many of the more senior roles were filled by what would today be regarded as middle-class individuals is rather at odds with the usual image.

THE ITINERANTS

The denomination's own accounts lay great emphasis on the humble origins of their preachers, but also on their formidable achievements, both practical and theological; and there is no doubt that some people did fit that description very well. It is by no means clear, though, that they were typical. The Prims were open to talent wherever it could be found; but they were not necessarily closed to prosperous talent, as the case of John Flesher confirms. Nor, for that matter, were the Prims safe from losses to others. When Nathaniel West seceded over his deployment to an unwelcome assignment, he took others with him, including Jabez Burns, who would later become a prominent (and prosperous)

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

Baptist.⁹⁵ Burns may have become rich only after departing, however, and so a sample based on a list of all known itinerants would include at least some who did so. In order to exclude such cases the source used was of every PM minister known to have 'died in the work', a term that includes active preachers and those superannuated from the role, extracted from a composite list of all Methodist ministers.⁹⁶ While incomplete, it remains the most reliable and readily accessible source.⁹⁷ A total of 540 identified individuals died before 1900, and although they exclude almost all of those who died before 1850 (not a large number, admittedly), the preachers active in this period are very well represented: over half of them began their itinerancy before the superannuation of Bourne and Clowes, and the mean interval between commencing itinerancy and death was 35.3 years. A sample drawn on a one-in-five basis produced 108 names.⁹⁸ Forty left wills, 36 of them (33% of sample) having sufficient assets to place them in the top 20% of the population. They were distributed as follows:

Table 9.3 Values of Itinerant Wills, with % of sample shown

Percentile	No	%
75-80th	4	3.7
81-85th	11	10.2
86-90th	8	7.4
91-95th	13	12.0
96th	3	2.8
97th	1	0.9
98-100th	0	0.0

⁹⁵ Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 207; Burns left enough to reach the 97th percentile when he died in 1876 (Probate Calendars for that year).

⁹⁶ Leary, *Primitive Methodist Ministers and Their Stations*; the preferred list was the indexes extracted by the Methodist Archive Service at John Rylands University of Manchester Library, as published on-line at www.library.cmsstage.manchester.ac.uk/specialcollections/collections/methodist/using/indexofministers/ (consulted 12th April 2011).

⁹⁷ In addition to its poor coverage of those dying early, it also excludes women who continued to preach after formal cessation of itinerancy, but who were not formally retired by Conference, such as Mary Porteus. Elizabeth Bultitude, the last female itinerant, does feature in the list.

⁹⁸ Non-PM ministers and those who died after 1899 were removed; the list was re-ordered to date of death order (alpha within year) and then every fifth entry selected for tracing so as to ensure a presence of probates across the period. One of the resulting 108 entries had to be randomly substituted by another PM preacher who died in the same year because he proved on investigation to be a Wesleyan, not a PM, preacher. The sample excluded John Flesher, hence the zero showing for 98%+.

Making the prudential assumption that the 68 itinerants whose wills were untraced were too poor to feature, it nonetheless shows, remarkably, that almost one in three itinerants dying 'in the work' stood above the 80th percentile in wealth terms. As with the elite lay group, there was no evidence of a dip in wealth measured by probates during the mid-Victorian period. The preachers who died before 1880 were less likely to leave a probated will, and left a smaller amount. There is no doubt that the early itinerants were remunerated on a niggardly basis, but the possibility that the connexion was recruiting more prosperous people to itinerancy just at the time it was recruiting poorer lay members can be safely discounted. Instead, the remuneration regime changed substantially after the Bourne era, and this conclusion is supported by a somewhat elderly study of the schism in Sunderland that spawned the Christian Lay Churches around 1870. It disclosed that rising clerical salaries were a key source of friction among some of the local stalwarts wedded to the idea of free, or at least non-enriching, gospel.⁹⁹ The remuneration shift is reflected in the prosperous standing at death of lifelong itinerants of known humble origins.

For example, George Lamb – a Hull stalwart converted at the age of 15, recruited at 18, who itinerated into old age – managed to accumulate enough to place him in the 96th percentile; Samuel Antliff, the 98th. Samuel's older brother William left only about one-sixth of that amount, but it still placed him above the 91st percentile; and as children of a widowed mother it is unlikely that they inherited their wealth.¹⁰⁰ Both the father and uncle of H. B. Kendall were able to leave material amounts of money, too. Connexional accounts do not reflect this however. For example, one early preacher who would later achieve prominence as President of Conference was William Lister.¹⁰¹ Kendall notes that

⁹⁹ Geoffrey Milburn, 'Tensions in Primitive Methodism in the Eighteen-Seventies' in *PWHS XL*, 1976, parts 4 (p. 91ff) and 5 (p. 135ff).

¹⁰⁰ Lamb appears in the one-in-five sample; the Antliffs do not.

¹⁰¹ The same William Lister who formed such an adverse opinion of Bourne at Sunderland in 1835.

Chapter 9: The Character of the Leadership

during the period 1830-32, he walked at least 2400 miles to fulfil his preaching engagements, and from the same diary source (not known to have survived, it being absent from the Methodist diaries index in the Rylands archives) he quotes the following:

During the months of July and August [1830], I missioned about a dozen of the villages. I often had long journeys, much hard fare, made my breakfast and dinner at times by the side of a spring of water, with a pennyworth of bread bought at some village shop.¹⁰²

It is likely that there was material discomfort and some hardship (particularly in the Bourne era), but the Sabbatarian imperative probably accounted for much of the walking, and the self-denial was probably as much religious as economic in origin. During this time, Lister was faced with the burden of educating two sons, and he did not stint: when he died, his executors were those sons, respectively an Anglican clergyman and a chartered accountant.¹⁰³ The cost of supporting them through their schooling and tertiary education en route to those careers would have been substantial; yet when he died in January 1880, he left movable property to the value of about £1750, placing him firmly among the top 5% of the population by wealth.

Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, was the incidental discovery of how many itinerants employed domestic servants – and how early the phenomenon surfaced. This was not planned as a wealth measure, but in seeking unambiguously to trace individuals for probate, one key resource was the census and it was impossible not to be struck how frequently the PM preacher had a resident domestic servant. In order to confirm the impression, all 108 itinerants in the one-in-five sample were therefore re-sought in the censuses from 1841 onwards, and even some of those who left no traceable will proved to have domestic servants. Eight were unclassifiable as their only appearances were as visitors in others' homes, and thirty-five more were untraceable: many of these were short-

¹⁰² Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 173; the earlier walking reference is drawn from p. 81.

¹⁰³ Lister died on 22nd January 1880; Probate Calendar, 1880.

lived itinerants while others were probably single men who lodged, and were overlooked in the Censuses. These were all assumed therefore not to have employed a domestic servant. The rising propensity of the remainder to employ a servant is shown below.

Table 9.4: Propensity to employ a domestic servant

Census date	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891
No of Itinerants at census date ¹⁰⁴	79	85	75	60	30
No with servant	5	8	12	19	9
%	6.3	9.4	16	31.7	30

Both the early presence and the surprisingly high rates of servant employment run counter to the usual perception of the hard-pressed preachers, even allowing that the direct cash cost of live-in staff was much lower than now.¹⁰⁵

DISCUSSION

As highlighted earlier, these are only partial descriptions of the wealth of these people at death, and the search process is fallible, particularly in relation to those who died before 1861,¹⁰⁶ when national calendars first appeared, or those where the recorded date of death is significantly in error. This last is not a small risk: William James Brownson, one of the sampled itinerants, spent his career in the North and Midlands, and is recorded in Methodist lists as having died in 1893. No trace of his dying or probate could be found in the relevant places or date, because the only person of that name died in Kent, four years after the date recorded in connexional records; his widow's name failed to match; and he was not listed as a retired preacher. Only by returning to the census to discover that he had been widowed in the period leading up to 1891, then tracing the re-marriage, which

¹⁰⁴ Table refers only to itinerants who died before 1900, in order to reflect 19th century remuneration levels and recruitment strata.

¹⁰⁵ Of course, the domestic servant needed to be fed and clothed, and needed a room; so there were significant non-wage costs that had to be paid for by the employer.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Joseph Preston, an itinerant who died in 1896, left a will, a copy of which appears in the archives (MARC, ref MA598.7), but not in any probate calendar. A pre-1858 case is that of the will of John Hallam, cited by Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 291, but so far untraced in either calendars or archives.

occurred after his retirement, in Axbridge, Somerset in 1894, and discovering that his second wife was herself a PM preacher's daughter, was it clear that these two were the same person and this was sufficient to tip the scales in favour of his inclusion in the list of testators.¹⁰⁷ No doubt better data and improved search tools will in future reduce the number of such elusive cases; yet what has been accumulated here is in two respects conclusive. The population-level data confirm that the five men featured in the opening part of the chapter were not untypical, as examples of notable figures in the connexion, in terms of their socio-economic position. The people who ran the organisation were significantly more prosperous than the followers; and while the followers got poorer in the mid-Victorian era the leaders, and the itinerants, did not. Discourse drove down the church's recruitment profile as the Prim legends became increasingly self-fulfilling, while that of its preachers and elite members rose; yet that same discourse ensured that those increasingly prosperous chroniclers would continue to accentuate old hardships, thereby discreetly obscuring their own situation.

It raises the intriguing question, though, of why more of them did not decamp to Wesleyanism or Congregationalism, simply for reasons of status. The connexion's emotional worship was probably more salient to these men in their youth, and there was no doubt discreet social pressure for them to jump ship in their mature years, as other PM figures did.¹⁰⁸ The most reasonable explanation in the case of the laity may simply be the denial of spiritual ascendancy to the itinerant class, coupled with the much greater

¹⁰⁷ Marriage dated to 1st quarter 1894 via FreeBMD Marriage index online, based on GRO England and Wales Civil Registration Indexes (www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/search.pl); Brownson's will, Probate Calendar 1897; entries for Thomasin Driffeld, née Brown, see RG12/2858/20/6 and HO107/2170/459/10.

¹⁰⁸ To undertake detailed research on this (no prior work having been uncovered) falls outside the scope of this thesis. Yet it is impressionistically confirmed by the losses of e.g., James Bonsor, who defected to the Wesleyans around 1825 (Petty, 1860, pp. 162/3), Thomas Steele, son of James Steele, and John Andrew, Jnr., later Mayor of Congleton and son of the donor of the land on which the town's first PM chapel was built (Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 541/2). The departures of the itinerants West and Burns (previously cited) to other denominations are also noted, but none of the three references to Joseph Arch (all in vol ii) mentions that the former local preacher and MP became an Anglican in later life.

operational clout enjoyed by them as a result. A rich Wesleyan might get some modest local power, but was surrounded by other prosperous members and outvoted by the youngest itinerant; a rich Prim had less competition and an inbuilt 2-1 majority over the professionals in nearly all of the forums of the church.

Yet this did not mean that the itinerants were powerless, or that the role lacked appeal. Flesher and Petty were among the leading itinerants of their era; their social origins are some distance removed from the popular image; but they help to explain why – for some at least, in the formative era – the Prims were no less appealing in career terms than more prosperous and respectable denominations. In the Napoleonic era, young men might be attracted to the preaching role with any of the expanding denominations, and as later newspaper evidence shows, youthful preachers were a contemporary feature among Congregationalists, Baptists and Methodists alike; unlike the Prims, they tended not to broadcast the fact, however.¹⁰⁹ Those other denominations had older men of experience and talent, and the reins of power were a long way off for a young pastor trying to make his way among them. The Prims' itinerants lacked that senior cadre, thanks both to their recent origins and to the clout of senior laymen. So their gifted preachers were almost exclusively young. In consequence, although men such as John Flesher and John Petty started no younger than they had planned to do already with the Wesleyans, they were able to advance much faster. By 1829, Petty was superintendent of the most prestigious circuit, Tunstall, and Flesher the denomination's most skilled active preacher. The Prims in short provided both rapidly expanding opportunities, and fewer established internal challengers for preferment, especially for those who arrived with the important advantage of education.

¹⁰⁹ *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 15th February 1841 (referring to preaching around 1775); *Wrexham Advertiser*, 8th February 1873 (referring to 1825); *Liverpool Mercury*, 6th July 1882 (referring to 1816); *Newcastle Weekly Courant*, 17th July 1885 (referring to 1839).

Bateman, Flesher and Petty were born before the Prims came into existence, and played increasingly important roles in the movement from the 1820s onwards, whereas Heath and Mayer were born after the Napoleonic War, and never reached national office, although both were important local figures. They undermine the notion that Prim commitment to lay leadership made it a more democratic church. The policy was designed to prevent the clerical domination that was implicit in the camp meeting dispute, and was seen in full flower in the Leeds Organ dispute two decades later. For Bunting, the case was nothing less than 'an insurrection against the pastoral office', and for that reason alone it must be put down.¹¹⁰ The Primitive Methodist Connexion could and did prove to be no less autocratic when the occasion demanded, but it remained committed to the numerical dominance of the laity precisely so as to ensure that its preachers were not priests. And, of course, the laymen in conference were preachers anyway, but not itinerants; and their instincts were not particularly democratic.

That is the force of the observation made by Ritson about Bateman. He remarked that Thomas was typical of the lay preachers who built the Connexion, but he was hardly here referring to the early boy-preachers or even the few talented women who were rigorously excluded from office from day one; nor did he mean the mavericks such as Benton and Wedgwood. He meant men such as Bateman, Heath and Mayer. Often self-employed businessmen, they held significant office in the movement, sometimes for many decades, and often in tandem with an involvement in local politics or administration. For them the Prims had an appeal that the Wesleyans did not: access to power as a layman. For those less exercised by the prospect, other churches had more to offer in status terms, so the typical Prim grandee was self-selecting towards the ambitious but self-effacing; the

¹¹⁰ Benjamin Gregory, *Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism, 1827-1852*, London, 1899, p. 48ff; quoted words from p. 59.

Wesleyan equivalent towards the respectable. The differences were those of emphasis, and were not always large; but the collective consequence was that it was led by one sort of people, and patronised by another, while everyone imagined otherwise.

The modern discourse has the effect of maintaining the legends no less effectively. Our contemporary priorities are reflected in the weight accorded to PM figures in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB).¹¹¹ Apart from Bourne and Clowes, the only other names whose contribution to the movement as a whole might be classed as individually significant are Arthur Peake and William Hartley (wrongly stated to have been uniquely a lay President of Conference), respectively the leading theologian and greatest benefactor in the connexion's history.¹¹² The remaining twenty-three PM-referenced entries in the ODNB comprise twelve trade unionists, six of whom were also lay preachers at some stage, while another was a life-long Sunday School superintendent; eight full-time nineteenth-century preachers, made up of three men and five women, none of whom held any office; one educationalist incidentally a lay preacher; a businessman ally of Hartley, who held no office in the movement; and finally a twentieth-century minister, Robert Wearmouth, whose writings rather than his ministry earn him his place. The coverage is a useful corrective to the view that the nineteenth-century evangelical project was an exclusively male middle-class phenomenon, but it tells the reader very little about the movement's position on class and gender issues.

Robert Wearmouth, the most recent of those listed in the ODNB, was in no doubt about the former. He claimed that his church played a pivotal role in working-class emancipation,

¹¹¹ There are 47 ODNB entries which feature the term 'Primitive Methodist', of which 20 are entirely incidental, such as agnostics whose marriage took place in a PM chapel.

¹¹² Kendall, *Origin*, ii, p. 20. Kendall's list of lay Presidents does not cover the earliest names, such as James Bourne. He may be typical of them in terms of his lay status.

expanding horizons and providing platforms for generations of activists. 'From the beginning', he wrote, 'the Primitive Methodists were enthusiastic supporters of the Trade Union movement.'¹¹³ This is subtly wrong: *some* Primitive Methodists clearly were, but *Primitive Methodism* was not. It was indifferent to the fate of the Luddites, and hostile to their activities; it was resolutely antiradical, prepared to rent rooms to Chartists while disapproving of their stance on the Corn Laws and ejecting their most prominent PM supporter, Skevington. When it first took a positive stance on trade unionism in the 1870s, it was even then highly qualified, being cautiously supportive of the non-confrontational form and hostile to excesses on either side. If the denomination played a significant part in the early education and moulding of a generation of trade union activists towards the close of Victoria's reign, it was unintended. The economics of Prim operations required them to have a much greater number of unpaid officials than their competitors, and that was how Simpson, the Victorian architect and builder, could note that his PM chapel was the fourth most expensive among 10 Nonconformist builds in unit capital cost terms, but the cheapest in terms of seat rents (as cited in Chapter 8). As earlier noted in relation to defectors to Wesleyanism and elsewhere, losses of trained activists were an ongoing reality. Survival depended upon a steady supply of Sunday-School teachers, class-leaders, local preachers, stewards, treasurers and candidates for other positions of authority. The effect of thereby training a cadre of proletarian activists was incidental; and unlike the stalwarts lost to Wesleyanism and beyond, some of the trade unionists remained loyal servants of their church.

¹¹³ Wearmouth, *Struggle*, p. 175.

SUMMARY

Considering the social connections of Bateman, and the political ones of Heath and Mayer, it is hardly credible that Primitive Methodism was a cradle of proletarian class-consciousness in the decades around its Jubilee. The church, whatever the divergent personal stances of leaders and followers, was at that time at least apolitical and socially conservative. Thus the image of the church as a route to working-class political power seems to owe more to hindsight – and to the experiences of a few for whom subsequently it was – than contemporary reality for the majority. Had the Prims been a cradle of left-wing radicalism, or even merely been seen as one, it is hard to see how the gentlemanly and well-heeled Flesher, Mayer the multi-property owning Tory butcher from Newcastle-under-Lyme, the cautious and prosperous farmer ally of the squirearchy, Bateman, or the wealthy Heath would have welcomed it or been welcome within the connexion's corridors of power. People such as John Oxtoby, Ann Carr and the Brownswords added the colour; the people discussed in this chapter added the substance. Yet they carefully concealed the fact of their circumstances; trapped within a heroic discourse of adversity, they presided over a connexion that progressively came to fit the image of a church of the social margins. Flesher's 1845 article shows that the founding generations reached out to the humble, particularly those would form the industrial working class and the rural labouring poor, not out of fellow-feeling based on class solidarity but Arminian conviction, Evangelical activism, and class-blindness. Above all, it stemmed from the belief that they were latter-day apostles ministering to all, including the poor, even if that meant suffering for their faith. Hindsight has caused us to read in what the church became 'evidence' of what the founders set out to be. It is not.

I am seeking to rescue [the humble of the past] from the enormous condescension of posterity.¹

Edward Thompson, 1924-2003

From the outset, this research has had to confront the problem of evidence. Not only was existing information about the early years of the Primitive Methodist Connexion sparse; it was also suspect. This, of course, is true to some extent of all historical research, because history is necessarily about imagining a past based on evidence that is incomplete and unreliable. Observers do not have a panoptic view of events; they bring their prejudices to the observation and recording; where they write retrospectively, they cannot avoid the problem of hindsight and often fall victim to dignifying their and others' actions with a spurious rationality that they did not possess at the time. Yet the problem was particularly acute here, because the main source of early evidence not only could be shown to be tainted; it also created a template by which others interpreted and recorded events with the same spin applied.

Overlaid upon this is the problem of interpretive bias, because the subsequent scholar cannot remove hindsight: knowing how things turned out, and having access to information that many of those involved in recording events at the time did not, can expose causal patterns otherwise hidden; but this is a decidedly dubious advantage. Sometimes, perhaps frequently, events turn out other than as intended, and it is too easy to read in the outcome proof of the intention. But the larger problem is that all who visit the facts indulge their prejudices, the present writer no less than anyone else. The thesis has argued that this largely explains why the source problem itself has not hitherto been addressed.

¹ Thompson, *English Working Class*, p.12.

A small number of key principles for the conduct of the research flowed from this. First, the *intentions* of the compilers of evidence were so far as possible distinguished from the reality they were reporting; because all too often this exposes manifest discrepancies. In the case of evidence written by the Prims themselves, it particularly required a more sceptical approach to explanations and characterisations of events, than to the reports of the events themselves.

Second, the written record was tested against other evidence more resistant to the carriage of prejudices – both at the time and subsequently. The data sources chosen for this included those used by others previously (baptismal records and the 1851 Religious Census), some hitherto bypassed or dealt with cursorily (trustee records and the physical evidence about chapels) and, crucially, new sources enabled by internet technology. In general these sources were numerical, or susceptible to numerical treatment. That did not eliminate the problem; for example, the PM chapel was typically smaller, plainer and cheaper than its competitors but not necessarily for the reasons adduced by the Prims or later scholars. This called for an explicit process of testing of hypotheses; and often the existing view was confounded.

Third, although the research has sailed in waters close to postmodernism, and on occasion has borrowed some of its principles, this is not a postmodern history of the movement, and has so far as possible avoided the language that comes with that. For this writer, it is not enough to problematise the texts, because it is not the texts that are the problem: it is their creators and interpreters. The research journey has therefore been a conscious process of getting past the texts to the people.

Finally, the research was conducted with a conscious intention to avoid overloading it with what Arno Mayer called 'organising generalizations and principles', and to be explicit in what these were. Too often these go beyond their necessary role of contextualising evidence to allow its meaning to emerge, and end up selecting both that evidence and how it is understood. Together, these four principles have shaped the conduct of the research.

THE FINDINGS

The journey began from the recognition that the present understanding of the movement rests, not upon the contemporaneous diaries of the man usually seen as the principal architect of Primitive Methodism, but on his drafts of autobiography, coupled with his other writings after 1819; and the two bodies of work tell a very different story. Being confident that the usual account was wrong was, however, some way short of discerning what explanations better fitted the evidence – because most of the literary sources were infused with the discourse he created. Bourne did not so much rewrite the facts as to reshape how they were presented, and to re-characterise the motives, rather than the deeds, of the players in the drama. Given the indifferent penmanship, he succeeded remarkably well: throughout the past two centuries, he has been seen as chief, and for much of that time the sole, founder; and the movement as one sprung essentially from camp meetings. The connexion's most distinguished historian disagreed, but no matter.² For most Methodists – and not a few historians – 'the Society of People named Primitive Methodists' remains Bourne's creation, and 31st May 1807 remains the seminal event.

The extent to which a new perspective is needed emerged from five evidence sources, the first of which was the scrutiny of source usages by previous writers. This historiographical

² Kendall, *Origin*, i, pp. 1-3.

task undermined several received truths, notably the target of the 1807 Conference ban on camp-meetings, the date at which Bourne decided on a separate connexion, and the character of the consolidation era from 1812-1819. It also suggested a rather different understanding both of Bourne's power-base and the timing and causation of the Bourne-Clowes alienation.

Then baptismal registers, in the main previously addressed by researchers with broader perspectives, were revisited, as also were their analyses. In them, the Prims were minor characters, and often merely a foil for the Wesleyans. The interpretations varied, but the data themselves exhibited an underlying unity. Taking the five most compatible datasets used in recent analyses, a previously unconsidered pattern of sharp rural-urban divide emerged, and also the differences between the Prims and Wesleyans were both narrower and more focused than is perhaps generally understood. It was the precursor to more in-depth analyses, mainly of Michael Watts' data, and then of further datasets. Together these produced some consistent and clear conclusions: the earliest Prims were far from social outcasts, or individuals swimming against the family tide; they were drawn from the 'respectable' working class and buoyed up by family networks within it. They were more likely to be literate and to occupy skilled jobs; yet the greater presence of a discreet middle class as baptisers, but not so much as baptismal fathers, warns against too simplistic and direct translations of the register fractions into an image of its membership. The movement was much more concentrated among unskilled followers in rural than in industrial areas; in the latter, they were often very similar to the Wesleyans, with the main distinction being the latter's much better showing among the non-manual categories. Of potentially greater interest though was the finding that the class composition of the movement did not follow the expected pattern of progressive rise. Individual

congregations of the mid-Victorian era were baptising fewer children of high-skill and non-manual parents in the 1850s and 1860s than they had a generation earlier.

When a similar longitudinal search was conducted among the movement's trustees – the only group of lay officials for which this proved feasible – a similar pattern emerged. The standing of trustees had the same pronounced dip in those middle decades. What also was apparent, though, was how much the trustees were differentiated from the followers. The typical PM registers contained only 5-10% of fathers following non-manual occupations, but over half of the trustees (prior to 1851) comprised people in these strata. The figures for the connexional elite were much higher still: of the 86 high-profile individuals who died in the Victorian era and whose circumstances could be traced, 93% were professional, self-employed, or of independent means. It would emerge that the baptismal data probably understated the incidence of such prosperous followers, some of whom preferred to adopt the baptismal rites of the established church for one or two generations, but even allowing some degree of upward revision here, the progressive domination of more senior connexional roles by what today we would regard as the middle classes – small businessmen, the self-employed and white-collar workers – confirms the suspicions raised in the first analyses of the data.

It was unfeasible to trace a large enough or sufficiently robust sample of followers or trustees to subject them to a second analysis, that of their worth at death. That could be done for the senior officials though, where sufficient data were often available to track them down in probate registers, data from which formed the third evidence set. The connexional elite proved to be fairly uniformly prosperous: it is dangerous to claim percentages, since the sample used is far from robust, but at least 64 important PM figures were identified with a personal worth at death among the top 20% of the population; and

half of those were in the top 5%. The itinerants could be subjected to the same analysis and investigation, and a one-in-five sample found that 37% of those who died before 1900 left traceable wills, a rate half as high again as among the population at large. Even assuming that all untraceable individuals left no will, and allowing that a few left trifling sums, it was nonetheless the case that one in six itinerants who died before 1900 were, at death, among the top 10% of the population in socio-economic terms. The process of tracing threw up one unexpected perspective: it would seem that, among the itinerants who died in the nineteenth century, almost one in three still alive in 1881 employed a domestic servant, and that the figure had been one in sixteen even in 1851, the year of publication of Thomas Church's work. The first itinerants suffered genuine hardship, but their progress to prosperity began early. The elite and the itinerants shared another characteristic: they avoided the pronounced mid-century dip from which, for laity and local officials, recovery was only ever partial and halting. On any reasonable reading, the bulk of the Victorian itinerants were more prosperous than their fellow-citizens; and while the movement never had the backing of the social and political elite, its key lay leaders were solidly middle-class, despite the occasional exceptional individuals of more modest station.

The Religious Census of that year formed a fourth dataset. It confirmed several of the patterns on view in the baptismal registers, and Snell and Ell's approach of conducting large-scale correlations produced new insights that enriched these understandings when applied more narrowly to the subject denomination. Here, 55% of the connexion's officials, of those who chose to self-describe, occupied self-employed or professional positions, a result that might have been discounted as a product of self-selection but for echoing the trustee results. The Census demonstrated that the pattern of geographic expansion contradicted most easy assertions about the connexion, and suggested that its dominant characteristic was its anti-metropolitan one. It was a church of some rural

counties which represented key recruiting-grounds, but it was even more a church of the industrial village and small-to-medium sized town. Nor, outside the East Midlands, was it a church of the socially dislocated: it may be that the Prims' success there was due to geography, in that they missioned early, consistently and successfully in counties adjacent to Staffordshire, rather than to their appeal to the victims of technologically-induced social dislocation who happened to live in some of those neighbours. Those dislocated workers in the East Midlands were above-average participants in all evangelical churches, and the Prims were not much different from others in this respect. Perhaps the most powerful finding though was that the Prims and Wesleyans tended to benefit or struggle together. The claim that the Prims exploited Wesleyan pastoral failures to engage the poor might be true in some places, but the numbers show that overall this cannot have been the case. Werner's and Thompson's accounts of uncaring Wesleyans hostile to the movement rests upon literary evidence, much of it the product of rhetoric, politics and hyperbole; the workaday reality of baptismal register evidence shows that the two operated in the same market-place. They did so on friendly terms: Chapter 5 touched upon the fact that in 1818, Lorenzo Dow returned to England, and he preached sermons to raise funds for the Tunstall PM Sunday School; but lacking sufficient space locally, the Prims borrowed the larger Wesleyan premises, with the blessing of the Old Connexion. It was in clear contravention of the 1807 directive against unaccredited foreign preachers that accompanied the camp-meeting ban, exposing how the rhetoric of the frenzied Napoleonic years had given way to the reality of local cooperation.

The Census allowed a different perspective upon the geography of PM expansion, by viewing it chapel by chapel, rather than, as via Snell and Ell, by means of national-level correlations. While overall the Prims doubtless succeeded because there was a demand for their brand of evangelical Protestantism, the evidence suggests that the pattern of that

Chapter 10: Reflections and Conclusions

success was supply-determined. The Prims succeeded in rural areas because they had more flexible missioning methods and lower operating costs than their competitors; their metropolitan failures occurred because they lacked the machinery and the crucial pre-existing network of potential allies; their inability even to match the underachievement of other churches was little if anything to do with urban alienation. Both the census and the surviving chapels in some areas highlighted the geographic distinctiveness of the Prims. They had a much more pronounced tendency to cluster than their competitors, and this was apparent whether the locality was dominated by cottage venues or dedicated chapels. It appears that this, rather than poverty or a lack of discernment, produced their network of small plain chapels. One hypothesis for this pattern (other than anarchic localism, which is intuitively unlikely, given the consistency of chapel designs in a movement effectively run at District, not connexional level for decades) is that it was driven by the taste for variety that underlay the circuit system for all Methodists, and the insistence on short, pithy preaching coupled with variety in religious exercises so beloved of Bourne.

It offers a starkly different image of what produced the PM chapel network, and that is the clearest legacy of the movement's pioneers. It is the fifth and final dataset. The small early country chapels have often survived less altered by time and progress, whereas the Prims' town chapels and later large churches have virtually all disappeared; and both things are the direct result of the strategy of the founding generations. Many small chapels are charming and characterful; most are a match for competitors of similar vintage and venue type; and the cash cost often bears little resemblance to the end-product. Yet their builders were often less hard-up than the legends allow. They chose to rely upon donations in kind and congregational labour, and to incur debt – sometimes even before the debt on an earlier chapel had been extinguished – because this was God's work, and he would provide. In fact, it was congregational growth that provided, and even when that slowed

down in the later Victorian era, rising prosperity among the members often came to the rescue. Yet when optimism and ambition ran out of control – as it so often did in larger centres, especially where the ambitions were harboured by wealthy individuals – the legacy was one of buildings too numerous and too costly for the followers who inherited the debt and maintenance burdens. The system was designed to cater for unending growth, and could not survive when the growth dried up. Even before connexional reunification, the strains of funding the chapel estate were showing; and often it was the pressing problem of unsustainable maintenance costs, not ecumenism, that drove congregational integration.

CONCLUSIONS

This, then, was a movement whose leadership was from the outset more middle-class than the written record allows. It appealed, not so much to the ordinary working class – and not much at all to the really poor – as to what would have been referred to, and readily understood by, most people who lived during the first half of the twentieth century as the ‘respectable’ working class. Leaders and led thus did not share a class, in the sense of a commonly-experienced set of adversarial relations with other largely fixed groups of people debated by Thompson in the opening passages of his master-work;³ they shared a set of social and religious values that bridged a class gulf. They sought self-respect, whether or not they were prosperous enough to afford it; they were prepared to practise deferred gratification; they passionately sought salvation, for themselves and others; and they saw their church as a Divine gift to assist them in that quest. Perhaps most of all though they shared an indelible belief that they were humble before God, weighed down

³ Thompson, *English Working Class*, pp. 9-11.

by the sin that was humankind's inescapable burden. They were all poor sinners, no matter how prosperous.

Hugh Bourne provided the unifying imagery, the prism through which to see the world thus, and used it to bolster his claims to primacy; his followers and colleagues used it for an altogether more innocent purpose. It built a movement in which little was as it first appears. The real leadership was discreetly middle-class from the start; its celebrated figures were the colourful characters and the legendary itinerants, but most of these were the movement's NCOs. They provided relatively few of its officer corps. Yet the old saying that England's public schools were not for the children of gentlemen, but the fathers of future ones applies here too: sons of modest officials often went on to occupy a more senior role in the movement; and while some sons of connexional grandees such as William Antliff and William Lister would choose other more socially aspirational churches, and others progressed to considerable prosperity in professional or business careers, enough were found to sustain the movement, initially at least. Kendall was thus relatively unusual in being a third-generation itinerant, but he was not untypical in that later PM itinerants came almost solely from PM families.

Ultimately though a movement required by its faith to be class-blind could not escape the social realities in which its members existed; it tried to do so, its members inter-marrying and seeking to be in, while not of, the world as they prepared for the next. The problem was not the inevitable drift of talent. It was the movement's increasing inability to replace it. By the mid-nineteenth century, the movement's professionals were substantially better-educated – and better-rewarded – for their work than the pioneers, but the discourse of past hardship hung on and they discreetly lived their more comfortable lives adopting public personae like their predecessors in order not to fracture that reassuring image of humility

and Divine favour. Yet the legends that they cherished were inexorably altering the church, by exposing it to losses and by closing off the market for new recruits, particularly those of higher status, hence the dip in paternal profiles in the mid-century baptismal registers. The legendary became the actual; and when growth stopped, the movement was soon in trouble. The power of Bourne's discourse which had done so much to energise early recruitment was what limited the movement's ability to do so later.

By the Edwardian era, it was probably too late to try to break out of this image, and the works written then confirm that the mythology remained as strong as ever. The three men who wrote the most important works of the period were each prosperous. They wrote of the heroic sacrifices of others no less well-heeled; and while the hardships were no doubt real, the likelihood is that many of the sacrifices were made for religious, not financial, reasons and had been made a very long time ago. Bourne had created a movement where, initially, it was impossible to pay much more than starvation wages; and when it could afford to pay more, the discourse he created made it impossible to admit to doing so; yet it was impossible to do anything else if recruitment standards were to be raised and retention improved. All three men lived in homes with domestic servants – as indeed did Charles Kendall, the historian's father.⁴ Yet by soft-peddalling the fact that the heroic hardships were often a product of the denominational culture of frugality and Sabbatarian self-denial, they strengthened the discourse by default. No-one should doubt the unfeigned admiration of these three men for the forebears of whom they wrote, nor indeed that many of them toiled mightily in the cause of their church; but nor should we deny that their emphasis on the humble and downplaying of the prosperous has provided later readers for whom the Victorian style is alien with the opportunity to mislead themselves. This thesis concludes that, all too often, we have gladly taken it.

⁴ While resident in Fern Villa, Great Driffield, aged 63: 1881 Census, RG11/4794/14/22.

We shall never know to what extent the missing diaries contradict Bourne's published writings in the period – he wrote the Connexional Magazine single-handed for over 20 years – although small glimpses such as the Journal entry that removed him from editorship in 1842, the events of the 1833, 1847 and 1849 Conferences, and the 1835 District meeting at Northallerton, show that Bourne had by then become the man whose genius lay in the past, and whose flaws stretched into the future. But discretion ruled and Bourne's reputation was maintained in order to preserve that of the movement he did so much to found. It was a sad conclusion to a life in which Bourne achieved so much, but few knew the facts, and he remained much loved and admired by those who did not know him.

By the 1930s, the Prims were confronted by significant problems of Methodist reintegration, and just as had happened seventy years earlier, church unity was more important than historical accuracy. By the mid-twentieth century Methodist historians had come to accept how much of the early accounts were myth-and-legend, and were now prepared to confront this – discreetly, within the covers of the *Proceedings* – but they found that few were prepared to listen. After the publication of Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963, the Prims were a jewel in the Methodist crown; the heroes who bucked the trend of cravenness to the state in the immediate post-Napoleonic era, and championed the emergent working class; by the 1980s they were lauded as a church that championed the cause of women, and latterly among Methodists, that of poor children. While the fairly crude academic characterisations of nineteenth-century evangelicalism have been greatly toned down over the past four decades or so, the Prims remain a glorious exception to the perceived rule that this was a movement dominated by middle-class men.

The evidence presented here suggests something rather different. Historians who have read too much into the contemporary rhetoric imagine that in the opening decades of the nineteenth century Wesleyan Methodism was 'stagnating...and failing to win over further converts and the working classes' (in the words of Snell and Ell, cited in the introduction to the opening chapter). This flies in the face of the numerical evidence: Wesleyan Methodism was booming without having to take risks. Despite a loss of members to the New Connexion, the old connexion had almost doubled in the fifteen years after Wesley's death, adding almost 50,000 members; and it would do even better in the next ten years, adding almost 80,000. Meanwhile Kilhamites had stumbled in their first decade; the Independent Methodists wedded to free gospel had done no better. The leadership had turned a benevolent dictatorship of select societies into a self-perpetuating oligarchy controlling a mass movement, and the fallout among those disadvantaged by that had proved negligible. This is the essential context for their Napoleonic-era actions and rhetoric. Their strategy was working well, and they saw every reason not to change – until the upstart Prims appeared on their competitive radar in 1820.

In the three decades to that point, the Wesleyan leadership saw authority and revivalism as polar opposites, in a way that at other times they were not. They had to (and believed they could afford to) *temporarily* reject revivalism as a threat to their authority and an unnecessary risk in a time of war. The North Staffordshire activists who challenged them came to believe (although initially they did not) that they had *permanently* to reject Wesleyan authority in order to practise that revivalism. A more flexible man than Bourne might have found a *via media*, but he was not for compromising. He created the discourse of heroic hardship, and it had four particular consequences. First, it mobilised the activists to a common purpose, and established a way of looking at itself that imbued the

organisation for generations to come, providing a philosophical cohesion that held together an otherwise ungovernable infant movement. Second, it produced a narrowly-focused but intense appeal to a specific social group, the 'respectable' working class, and since that was not so neatly targeted by other movements, the Prims established a strong market presence very rapidly. Third, however, the essential instability at the core of the movement was not eliminated in the fight over consolidation, merely diffused by geography. It produced decades of discreet guerrilla warfare, and once belated realisation of the issue emerged, it led first to a palace revolution and second to a careful cover-up. Finally, the discourse that had powered the movement's rapid growth proved to be its nemesis. At a time that other churches were still growing strongly, the Prims reached a point where losses to more respectable churches could not be replaced fast enough, because the faithful would not abandon the legends that were increasingly failing to chime with the uncommitted. The church tried to renew itself, first by broadening its social appeal, and then by trying to become an urban movement in preparation for reunification but the weight of history, and the determination of its ageing stalwarts not to change, could not be overcome.

In looking back at this, Methodist and social historians have seen something different. Today's Methodists recoil from the inhuman greed that drove the Victorians to condemn children to injury and death from long hours in mines or mills, and Victorian Methodists were not as much of an exception to that as their successors would like to imagine. For them, the real tragedy was the denial of salvation entailed, not the physical suffering. It was a different world-view for a different world, but by characterising the Prims as genuinely concerned about the casualties of the contemporary economy, it neatly provides the 19th-century movement with a 21st-century conscience. For social historians meanwhile, the image of the movement as one that needs to be seen as less unchristian (in

modern terms) is not something that exercises them too much; but by seeing it as a piece of working-class subversiveness, or simply as a demand-led phenomenon caused by the emergence of a new social class, Primitive Methodism is satisfyingly integrated into an account of Britain's uniquely non-revolutionary path to social inclusion and political engagement. For different reasons, therefore, both bodies of historians have found it all too easy to slot the old discourse into a more modern one.

Yet the early Prims did celebrate the glorious deaths of children converted before they died of disease or overwork; they were not prime activists for what we today would call social justice; they reserved as much or more contempt for the feckless poor as for those who placed them in that situation; and when Thomas Bateman dumped his elderly farm-labourers and their families onto parish relief, neither he nor anyone else thought that there was anything wrong with that. It was simply the way of the world, and trying to apply modern mores to that world is Edward Thompson's 'condescension of posterity' in full flower. It is not the only way that we have shoe-horned the past to fit our present sensibilities either. First, the evidence of the Prims' championing of women is decidedly more mixed than the contemporary account would allow. Second, there is the implicit (and deeply patronising) assumption that the Prims' prudential values represent those that the working class would really want, if only they did not suffer their material disadvantage or perhaps moral immaturity; it is all of a piece with the comfortable myths that Britain is populated by Tommy Atkinses, and that every neighbourhood has its Alfred Doolittle, ready to save (and entertain) the nation, given the chance. It is more likely that the discreet core of prosperous leaders and a larger body of enthusiastic working-class and lower-middle class supporters shared values that were alien to the great majority of the Victorian working classes – a term chosen deliberately to emphasise that there was no unitary class experience then that united the mass of the people in the way that it is so often seen to have

done during the first three quarters of the twentieth century. The church failed to engage with the majority because the hedonists and the 'diffusive Christians' were equally beyond its reach, if for different reasons; meanwhile even among the numbers who shared those values, the socially ambitious sought more respectable churches and those prepared to consume a milder diet could find easier outlets for their faith.

The narrowness of the church's appeal is as striking as the rapidity with which that appeal carved out its place in Victorian England. Hugh Bourne's discourse did much to ensure both things; but this is not a story of failure, just of limited success, both for the activists whose efforts made this church, and for the members whose lives were so often transformed by it.

Following the closure of the Hartley Victoria College (the former PM theological college in Manchester, henceforward HVC) in the late 1960s, its manuscripts were transferred to the Methodist Archive then in City Road, London, which in turn was relocated to the John Rylands Library, Deansgate, Manchester (JRULM) in 1977. The material does not appear to have been catalogued at HVC, and no surviving index can be found to ascertain precisely what was held; it was catalogued on arrival in the Methodist archive and then re-catalogued after transfer to JRULM. Neither of the latter can have extended to more than a physical inspection and numbering of the contents: for example the catalogue entry for what is claimed to be the B Text of Bourne's autobiography reads as follows:

Notebook (n.d.[1849]); Reference DDHB 2/2; Former Reference: MAW Ms 73.2;
Physical Description 158 leaves 22 x 28cm.
Scope and Content: Manuscript [Text B] of Hugh Bourne's autobiography.¹

It is clear that not all of the material that existed in the college in the 1950s has survived to the archive, as confirmed by the loss of the diary identified as Notebook G by HVC, covering the later months of 1814. Wilkinson cites the entry for a Quarter Day meeting at Tunstall which took place on 2nd July that year.²

A more insidious problem concerns the cataloguing and subsequent handling of the material. The 158 leaves stated to exist as the B Text in the index reduce to a mere 40 leaves in fact (folios 1-79, although originally numbered 1-77). Similarly, the A Text ought to contain 81 leaves, but in fact comprises four notebooks containing around 160 leaves (the counting of the binding materials, some of which are made up of multiple layers, and may contain writing, makes such counts imprecise). Not only has the material been redistributed between these two; they originally contained about another 40 leaves. That second issue may be set to one side while the more immediate one is addressed. The

¹ As stated in the on-line catalogue of MARC, 20 November 2012.

² Substantively cited in the main text: Chapter 5, *fn*18.

table below lists what the physical contents of DDHB2/1 and 2/2 – claimed to be the A and B Texts respectively – are as at 21st November 2012):

Text	Notebook no	Original folio nos	Renumbered	Chapters
A	1	1-77	1-79	1-23
	2	87-167	81-173	12-24
	3	171-279	175-277	25-35
	4	281-319	279-315	36-40
B	5	3-81	1-77	1-11

Note: The notebook numbering is by the present writer for ease of referencing.

The sequencing logic of chapter numbering and original folio numbering indicates that as written the notebooks comprise one stand-alone source, notebook 1, and a second source comprising notebooks 5, 2, 3 and 4 in that order.

In order to accord with the original cataloguing, the first source should be DDHB 2/1 and the second DDHB 2/2. This however does not align with the order understood by HVC, because a 1952 work, John Wilkinson's centenary biography of Bourne, details the material in slightly different terms: the A Text, which JRULM describes as DDHB 2/1 and comprises only 79 folios, is stated to comprise 313; the B Text (DDHB 2/2), which ought to contain only 70 folios actually contains 315. A sample of specific entries he cited in the biography confirms this understanding.³

There is a further source here. At some time before 1959, painstaking transcriptions of the entire Bourne MSS were undertaken at HVC, probably by John Wilkinson, and most probably in preparation for the Clowes and Bourne biographies. The originals are lodged at Englesea Brook Museum, and a xerographic copy was lodged with the Staffordshire Archive Service, later relocated on local government reorganisation to CSRO in Hanley.

These confirm the conclusion that as written, Notebooks 2-4 flow on from Notebook 5 and

³ Ibid: Wilkinson's A Text citations on pp. 18 (*fn*1), 22 (*fn*13), 23(*fn*20), 27(*fn*31), 28(*fn*33), 36(*fn*21), 49(*fn*66), and 67 (*fn*1) are word-for-word matches with the corresponding B Text material in the Rylands; and his B Text citations (of which there are many fewer) on pp. 38 (*fn*29) and 45 (*fn*56, 57) map exactly to the corresponding folio numbers in the Rylands A Text.

that Notebook 1 stands alone. They also show the A Text (comprising 5, 2, 3 and 4) to be the more substantial document. The content of individual Notebooks compares precisely (trivial errors and the loss of Diary G excepted) with the transcribed versions, and so the latter are taken to be authoritative here as a sufficient proxy for the originals in terms of content.⁴

The labelling issue is important though in that it implies the order in which the material was undertaken; and securing a clear understanding of that determines what we make of its significance. Here, it is rapidly apparent that whereas Notebook 1 was completed as an intentional end-product in a short time-frame,⁵ Notebooks 2-5 were not.⁶ On the face of it, the Rylands cataloguing seems better to fit the dating sequence of the material. Yet that requires that:

- Wilkinson, a librarian and academic who was intimately familiar with the material, read them the wrong way round; and
- Bourne produced, from memory and without the facility to consult others, a cohesive first draft of 23 chapters complete with chapter headings and *précis*, but when he returned home and had access to both sources and individuals, he produced a rambling, repetitive second draft – and then another considered third draft after that.

⁴ As an aside, the problem did not initially emerge, because the sample checks of autobiographical references were concentrated in Notebooks 2, 3 and 4, which have been returned to the order in which the material was held by HVC: only the first and fifth notebooks are now misaligned.

⁵ The material is written in part on the reverse of the preaching-plan for Bampton, New York State, 1844/45, and is signed by Bourne at Lancaster, NY, 4th June 1845. The first mention of an intention to write his autobiography is dated 26th June 1844 (Journal R f. 19), just before setting sail for America but his description of the voyage does not hint at much writing then due to sea-sickness; and he notes the completion of his writing on 5th June 1845 (Journal S f. 15).

⁶ Notebook 5 is bound in a February 1845 newspaper and contains a clearly retrospective footnote (f.7) that was dated 1848, and its immediate successor, Notebook 2, was bound in an 1848 railway timetable. Chapter 21 cannot have been written until 1848/49, as evidenced by references in f. 157; and therefore Notebooks 3 and 4 were even later.

It is surely more likely that the material arrived from HVC uncatalogued and that the person entrusted with the task, being unfamiliar with the Wilkinson source, noted the dating and content sequence of the Notebooks, and catalogued them accordingly: the earliest and complete Notebook as A, the other four as B. So common-sense archiving produced the allocation of materials originally, and chance handling error has later compounded (and partially reversed) the error thus introduced. That explains, no doubt, both how the archive and the Wilkinson view of the materials are opposed, and why it has proved hard to spot: but it does not answer the more important question. Was the text finished in June 1845 also the first to be *begun*; or was it produced as a second draft of the longer text which was begun first (probably only up to Notebook 5, both by content and the binding of Notebook 2)? In that case, much of the repetitiveness in the later chapters is explained by both the first draft status and the long time-frame over which it was undertaken. It also makes more sense in relation to the C Text; it is not a third draft, but rather a second attempt to produce a second draft from the now-expanded rough cut version.

By placing the longer version as a successor to, not progenitor of, the June 1845 draft scholars thus appear to find evidence of Bourne's mental decline.⁷ Perhaps it is; but then HVC for over a century of custodianship had the material the wrong way round; and unless this was an act of supreme carelessness or deliberate falsification the college authorities can only have done so based on the order understood by John Petty and John Walford, from whom the former received it. There is no evidence for that, and Petty's own *History* is marked by considerable care over sources, whereas there is clear evidence of disorganisation of the material after it left HVC. Accordingly, that does not seem a reasonable assumption to make; the HVC order – reflected in the transcriptions as well as

⁷ Notably, Woolley, 'Selective Memory?', p. 71, *fn*20.

Wilkinson's writings – is preferred. Exceptionally therefore, the transcriptions are taken in this thesis to reflect the authoritative source for the sequence of materials, as well as an adequate proxy for their contents; and references are to the original folio numbering as shown in the transcriptions, hence the erroneous use of page rather than folio numbering for the latter two drafts of autobiography.

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- 6.6 USEFUL WEB-SITES (in addition to those giving access to primary materials)

Internet Archive: <http://archive.org/details/texts>.

Measuring Worth (historical index of value): www.measuringworth.com/.

Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org/catalog/.

Rewlach Organisation –web-site devoted to Primitive Methodism in N. Staffs:

www.rewlach.org.uk.

Victorian Calendar generator: www.timeanddate.com/calendar/info.html.

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EARLY PM PREACHING PLACES – KEY TO MAP 1

Places on June 1811 plan

- 1 Tunstall
- 2 Stanley
- 3 Brown Edge
- 4 Bagnall
- 5 Baddeley Edge
- 6 Ramsor
- 7 Lask Edge
- 8 Gratton

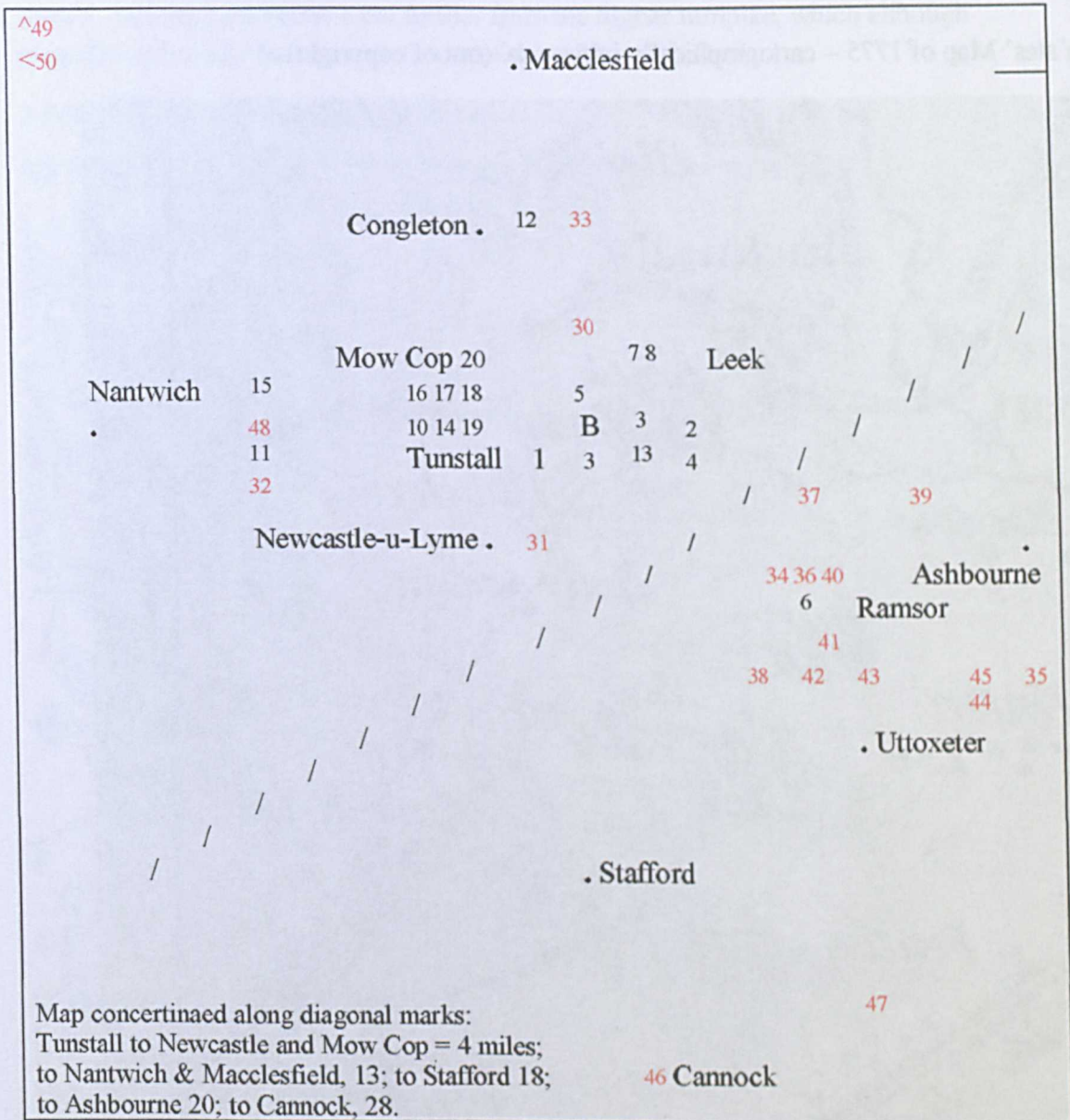
Additional places on Sept 1811 plan

- 10 Talke
- 11 Englesea Brook
- 12 Cloud
- 13 Norton
- 14 Butt Lane
- 15 Coppenhall
- 16 Roggin Row
- 17 Lawton Heath
- 18 Goldenhill
- 19 Pittshill
- 20 Mow

Additional places on March 1812 plan

- 30 Biddulph Moor
- 31 Stoke
- 32 Betley
- 33 Woodhouse Green
- 34 Whiston
- 35 Hollington
- 36 Cotton Wash
- 37 Cauldon
- 38 Alton
- 39 Swinsco
- 40 Stanton
- 41 Wootton
- 42 Rocester
- 43 Roston
- 44 Boylestone
- 45 Rodsley
- 46 Cannock
- 47 Cannock Wood
- 48 Weston
- 49 Risley (off map at Warrington, now Cheshire)
- 50 Five Crosses (off map at Frodsham, Cheshire)

Map 1: TUNSTALL and surrounding areas, showing 1811/12 preaching-places



Notes:

- 1 B denotes rough location of Bemersley Green Farm.
- 2 Places numbered in red appear first on March 1812 plan.
- 3 While Mow Cop, Ramsor and Tunstall are named for their PM significance, the remaining named places were the key nodes of the contemporary road network in the vicinity; the modern road network is misleadingly different, as Crewe and the Potteries towns displaced Nantwich and Newcastle-under-Lyme as the major centres of population and industry.

2: FORD HAYES FARM, 1775

Yates' Map of 1775 – cartographically imprecise. (out of copyright)



Extract of map courtesy of Steven Birks.

The imprecision can be gathered by comparison with the present OS map. The lower turnpike did not follow the route of the A5272, but ran closer to the minor road highlighted in the OS map. Thus it was much closer to both Ford Hayes and Widow Fields farms than shown. In turn, both farms were further from the higher turnpike, which although meandering broadly followed the route of the A52 at Ash Bank.

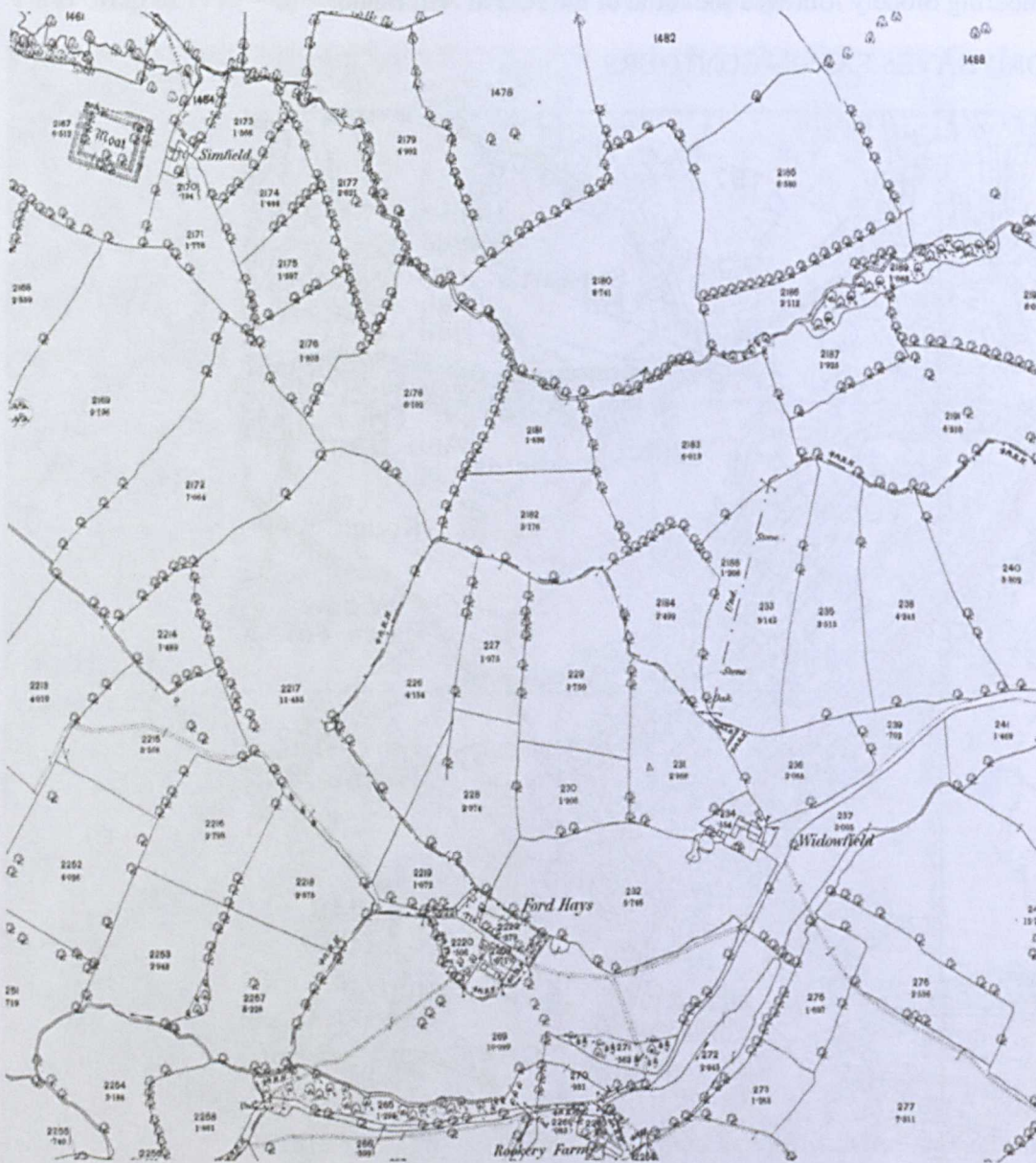
3 FORD HAYES FARM – CONTOURS



© Ordnance Survey, 2011

In order to obtain clearer identification of access, the higher-resolution inaugural OS map is preferable:

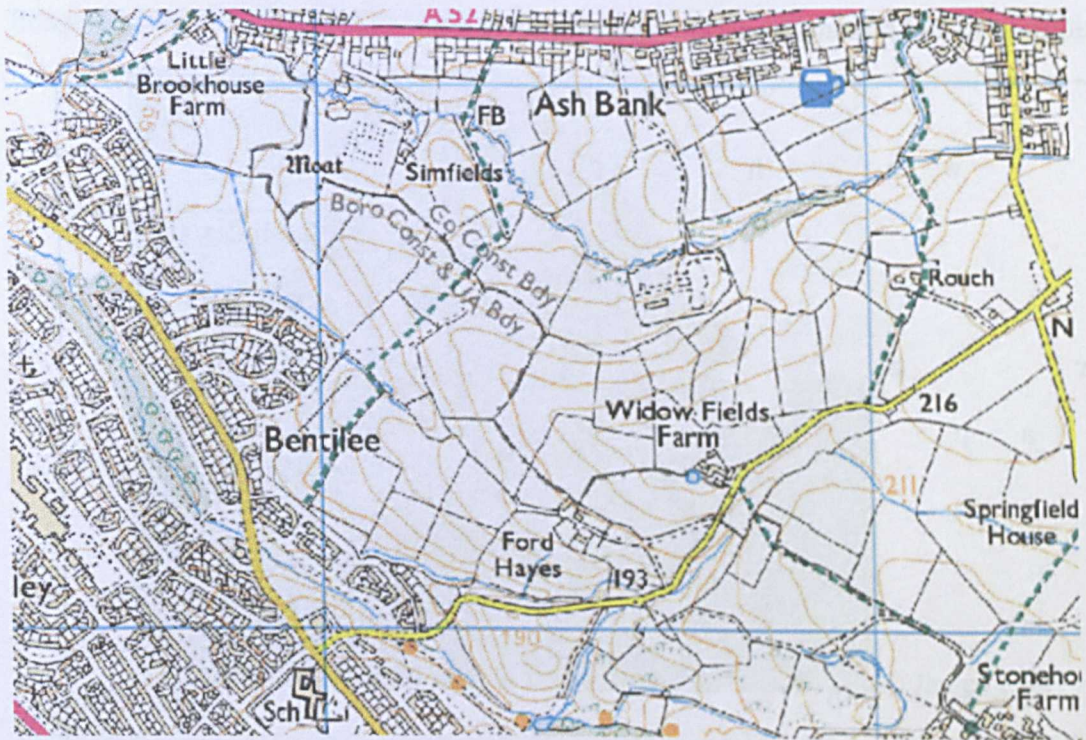
4 FORD HAYES FARM, c. 1880 (First Edition OS Map, SJ924461).



© Edina 2011, courtesy of Ordnance Survey

This map, with Ford Hayes Lane highlighted, shows that the three farms lay close to it, with Ford Hayes Farm connected both by a y-shaped track running roughly east for vehicular traffic and a south-westerly footpath offering a more direct route to Bentilee. A higher-resolution version of the current OS map confirms the first of these:

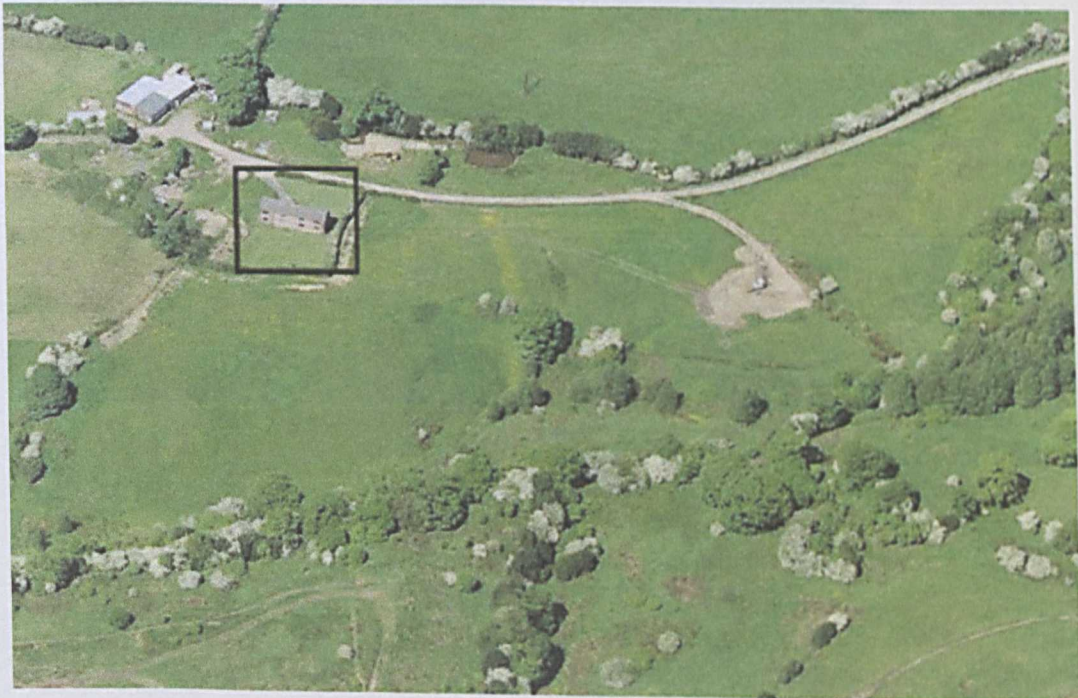
5 FORD HAYES FARM, HIGHER RESOLUTION MODERN OS MAP



© Ordnance Survey 2011

But contrast with:

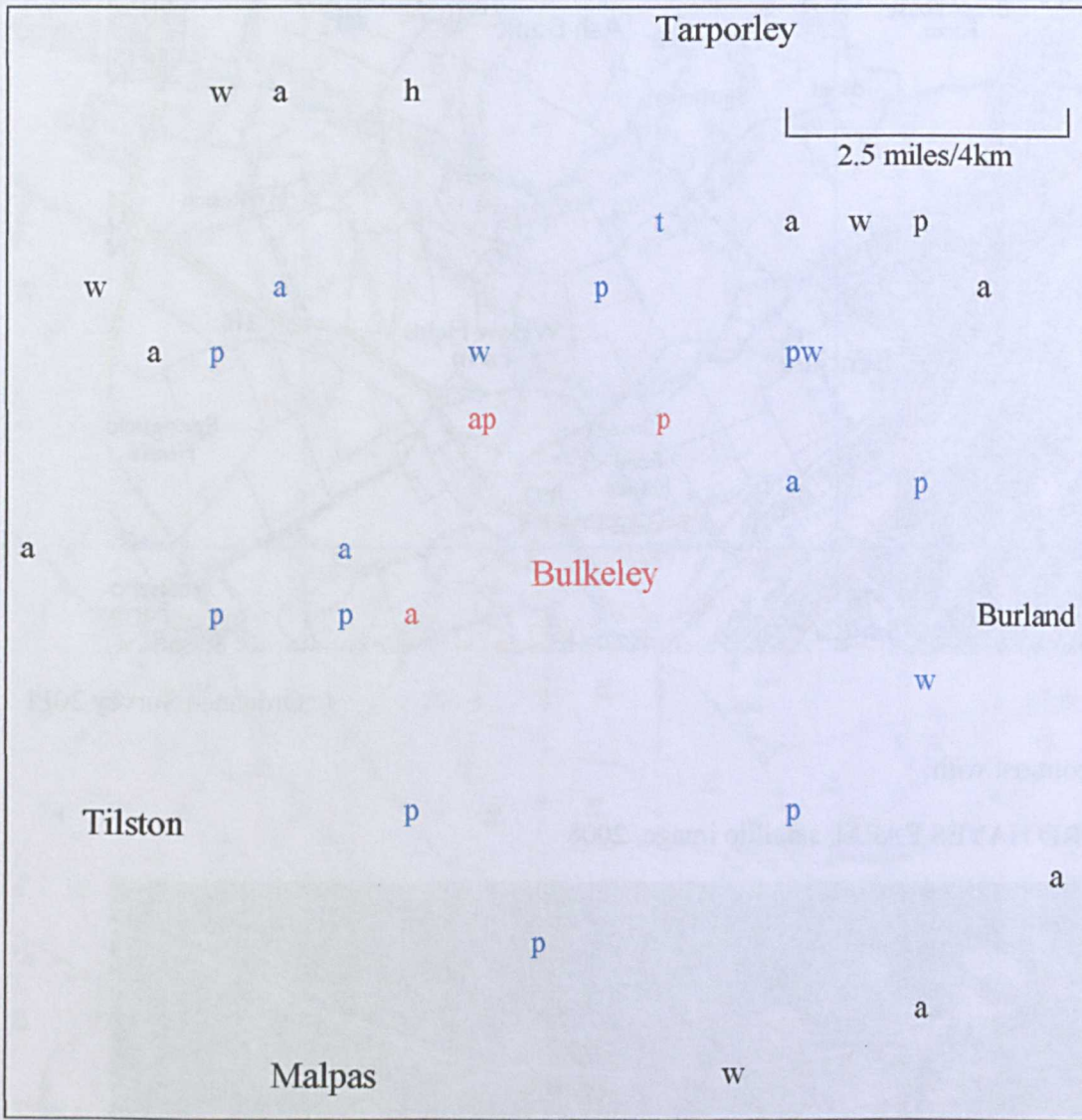
6 FORD HAYES FARM, satellite image, 2008



© Steven Birks, Potteries Organisation and MS virtual earth 2008

7 Area of SW Cheshire around Bulkeley (SJ532545): General Location Map

Locations correct to national grid 1km reference level



Notes:

Entries in **red** are within 2 miles of Bulkeley

Entries in **blue** are within 4 miles of Bulkeley

a = Anglican church

p = Primitive Methodist chapel (Burland is site of PM chapel only)

w = Wesleyan chapel

t and h denote specific PM chapels at Tiverton and Huxley.

All three denominations closely collocated in Malpas, Tarporley and Tilston; all three also present (but not in same national grid square) in Bunbury and Tattenhall.

Only churches and chapels in existence before 1880 shown.

Named locations are at point denoted by initial letter.

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 1 Maesbury PM Chapel, Shropshire, 1834



© Janice Cox

Image 2 Bomere Heath Congregational, Shropshire 1827 (as refenestrated late 19th century)



© AJC 2009

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 3 Macclesfield Beech Lane PM Chapel, 1830

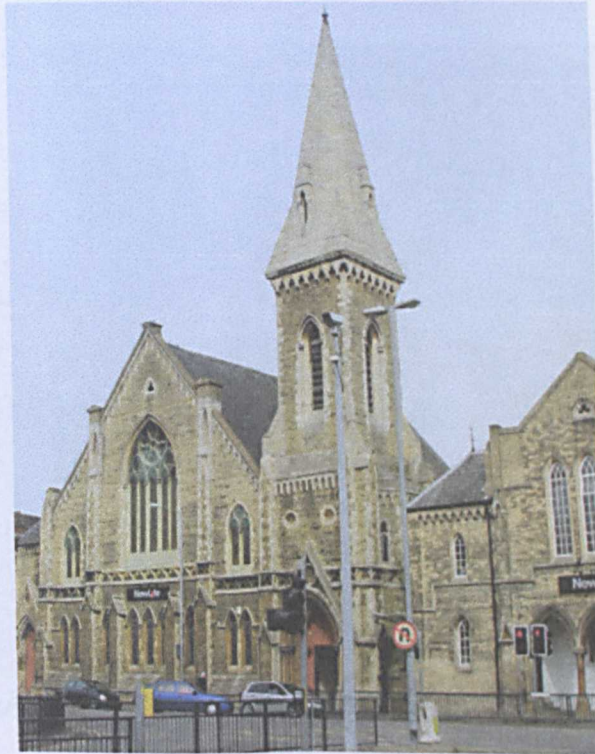


© Len Brankin

To appreciate this chapel's original milieu, see the old image in Kendall, vol I, p. 539

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 4 Bailgate Congregational chapel, Lincoln, 1876



© Steve Bulman

The adjacent (right-hand) building is an earlier chapel

Image 5 Bailgate Wesleyan Chapel, Lincoln, 1880



© Steve Bulman

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 6 Englesea Brook PM Chapel, Cheshire, 1828 (as extended 1832: the one-storey extension is 1914)



© AJC 2007

Image 7 Clive Green WMA Chapel, Winsford, Cheshire, 1849



© AJC 2007

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 8 Boushwaite Wesleyan Chapel, North Yorkshire, 1890



© Colin Hinson © Colin Hinson

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 9 Huxley PM chapel, Cheshire, 1861



© AJC 2008

Image 10 Tiverton PM chapel, Cheshire, 1864



© AJC 2008

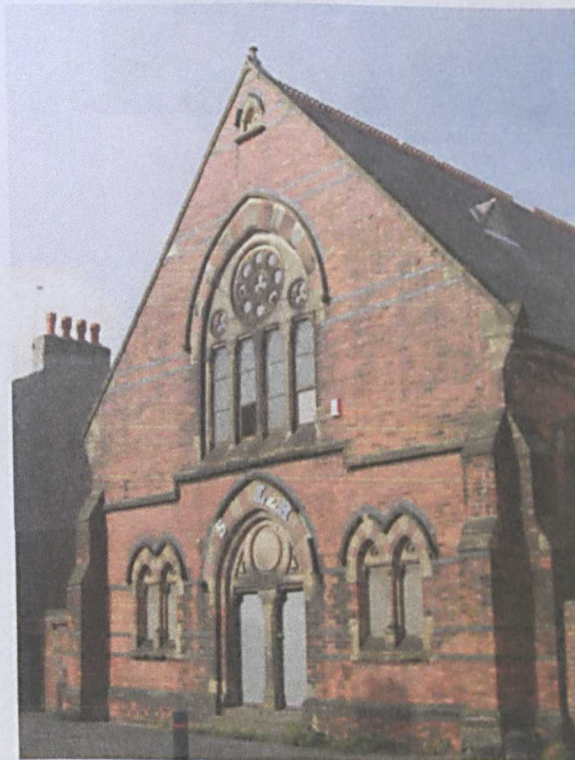
CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 11 Hartington Street PM chapel, Barrow-in-Furness, 1874



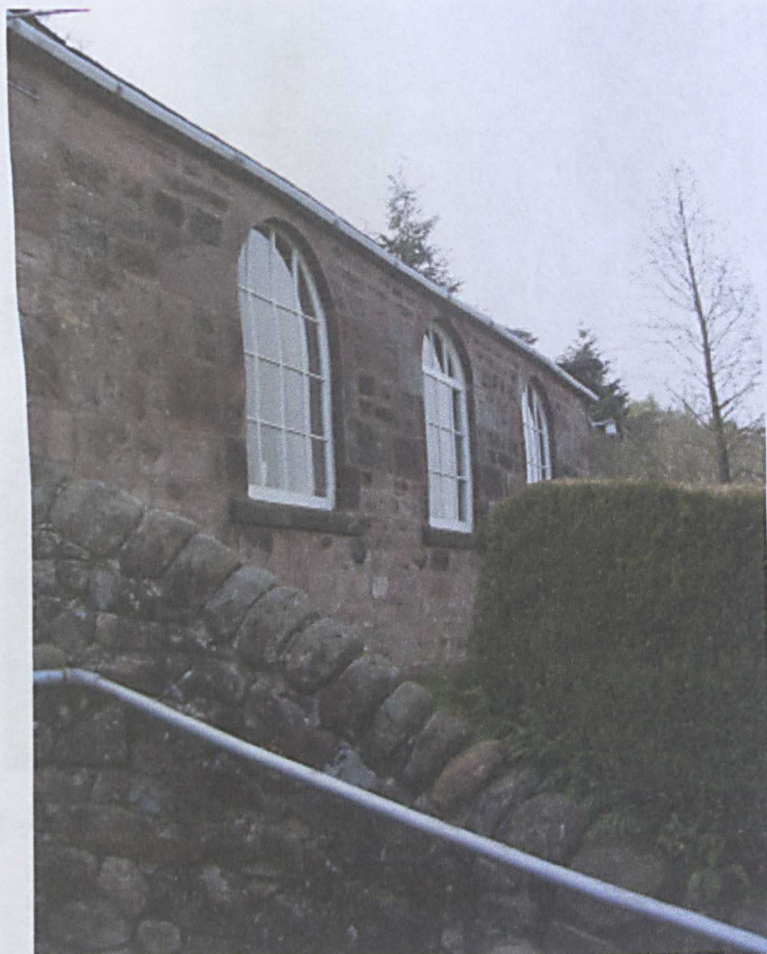
© Aidan Jones

Image 12 Marsh Street PM chapel, Barrow-in-Furness, 1875



© Aidan Jones

Image 13 Cloud PM chapel, Staffordshire, 1815



© AJC 2010

Image 14: Key Green Wesleyan (2nd) chapel, Cheshire, 1845



© AJC 2009

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 15: Ellerdine Heath Wesleyan Chapel, Shropshire, 1814 (as extended 1830s)



© AJC 2008

Image 6 Englesea Brook PM Chapel, Cheshire, repeated for ease of comparison.



© AJC 2007

Image 16: Reproduction of sketch of Hull Mill Street PM Chapel 1819 (source, Kendall, i, p. 373, out of copyright)

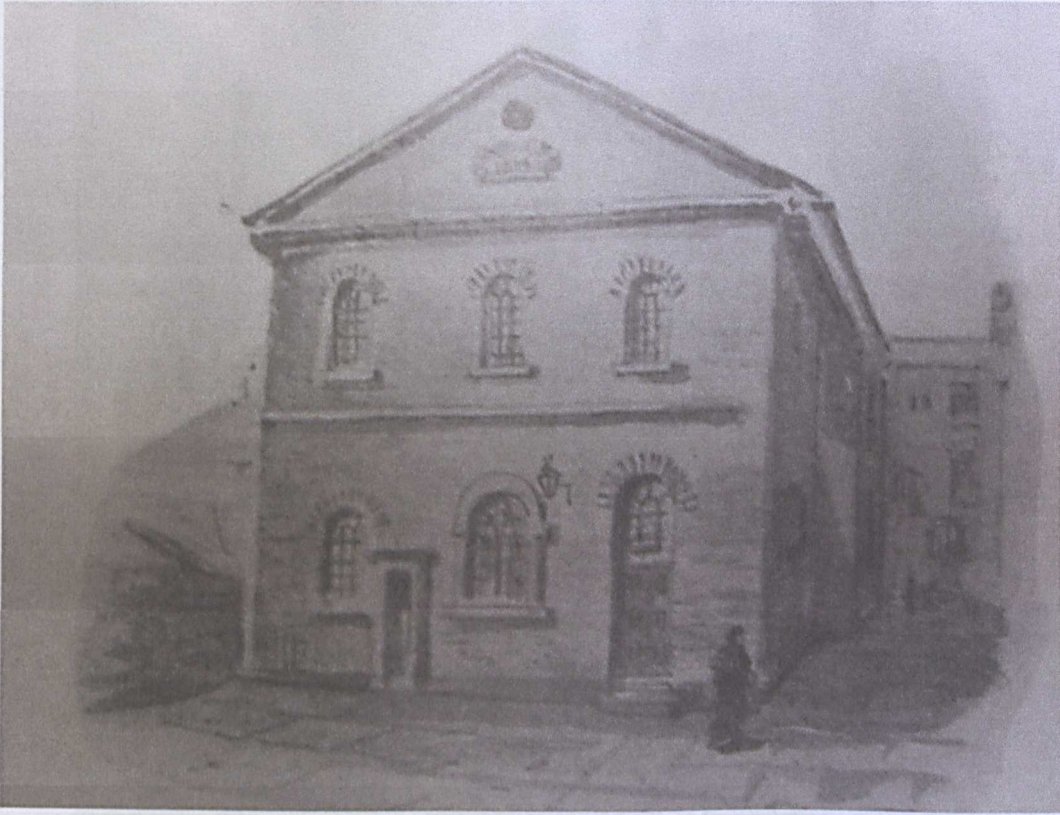


Image 17 South Cave Wesleyan Chapel, East Yorks, 1816



© J Murray

Image 18 Cottingham Zion Congregational, East Yorks, 1819



© J Murray

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 19 Scarborough Durham Street Wesleyan Mission-Room, N Yorks, c. 1885.



© C Hinson

This is a narrow street, and the building therefore hard to photograph.

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 20 Pennington Memorial PM Mission-Hall, Kendal, 1899



© M Emmott

Image 21 Bradfield Road PM Mission-Hall, Crewe, 1899



© AJC 2007

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 22 Whitchurch Wesleyan Chapel, Shropshire, 1810



© Steve Bulman

Image 23 Cheltenham Wesleyan Chapel, 1839



© Graeme Harvey

Image 24 Newark Wesleyan Chapel, Notts, 1846



© Jim Fisher

Image 25 Tonge Wesleyan Chapel, Greater Manchester, 1886



© Mike Berrell

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 26 Lowther Street Congregational Chapel, Carlisle, 1843



© Steve Bulman

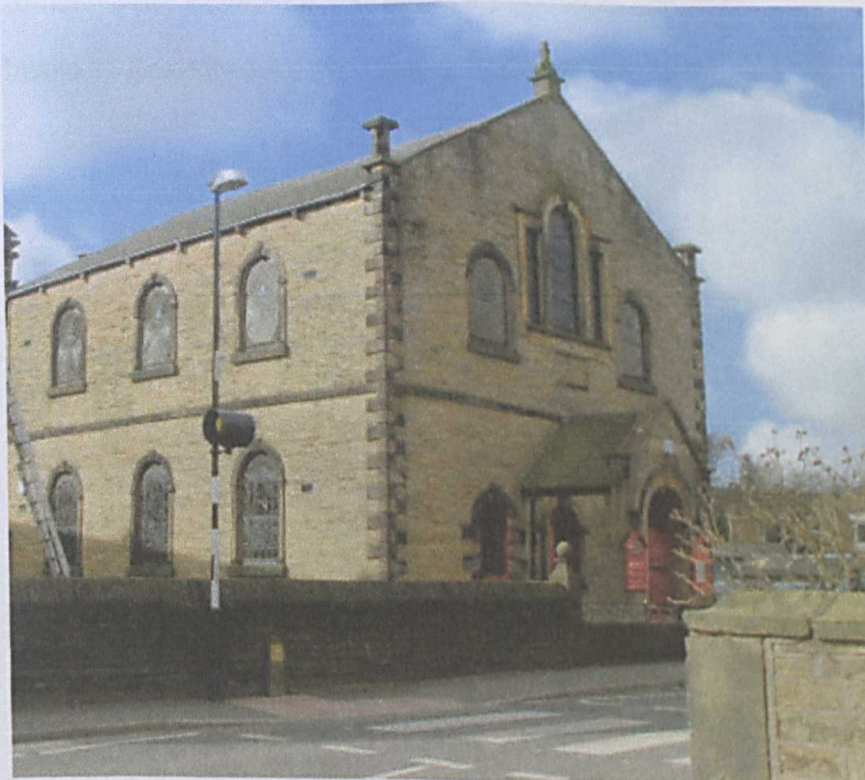
CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 27 Staithes PM Chapel, N Yorks, 1880



© Steve Bruce

Image 28 Hayfield Wesleyan Chapel, Derbyshire, 1780



© Mike Berrell 2011

Image 29a Glossop PM, Derbyshire



© AJC 2012

This is the attached Sunday School which unusually has finer detail – although less refined stonework – than the chapel itself. It does, however, show more clearly the Venetian window, just starting to add decoration and to extend the width of the flanking windows. A view of the chapel (necessarily oblique) is below:

Image 29b Glossop PM Chapel, Derbyshire, 1855



© AJC 2012

Image 30 Chorley PM Chapel, Lancashire, 1866



© Mike Berrell 2010

Despite appearing derelict, this is now a Masonic Hall; note the swag, echoing that of the village chapel in Tiverton (Image 10). This is the purest example of Venetian; the Brindley Ford example below marks a significant departure.

Image 31 Brindley Ford PM Chapel, Staffordshire, 1889



© AJC 2012

Image 32 Leyland PM Chapel, Lancashire, 1892



© Phil Kapp

Bradfield Road Mission-Room's central window appears to be a combination of the two preceding images, bringing together the widened flanks with the less distinct unifying arch.

Image 33 Northorpe PM Chapel, Lincolnshire, 1849



© James Murray

It is likely that the schoolroom extension necessitated the insertion of a doorway where there had previously been a symmetrical window (the fanlight over the door is out of proportion) to replace access originally located on the obscured wall. The very slight pointing of the arches is interesting, but not enough to class this as Gothic.

Image 34 Welsh Row PM Chapel, Nantwich, 1840



© AJC 2007

A Venetian or triple-array central window above the door would have detracted from this chapel's plainness, while underlining a dominant centre.

Image 35 Lingwood PM Chapel, Norfolk, 1866



© George Weston

CHAPEL IMAGES

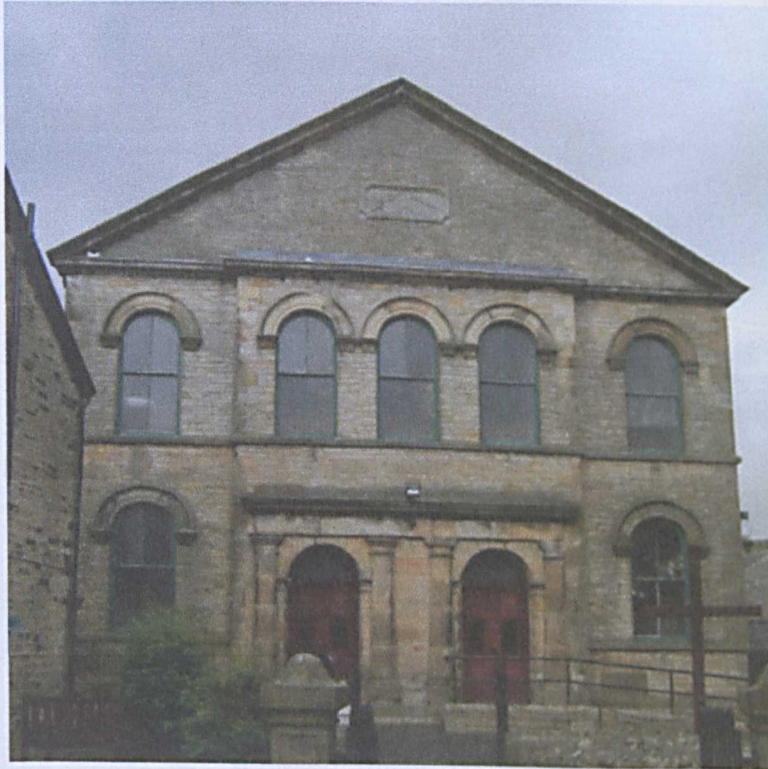
Image 36 Bradshaw PM Chapel, Tottington, Lancashire, 1890



© Mike Berrell

CHAPEL IMAGES

Image 37 Middleton-in-Teesdale WM Chapel, 1870



© Steve Bruce

Image 38 Middleton-in-Teesdale PM Chapel, 1872



© Steve Bruce